

THE WOMEN 'S CELEBRATORY MARCH

The women's celebratory march which so smoothly took place this morning is a long cherished ideal that unfortunately had to be shifted to the back burner because of an overload of activities of Women's Action for Development and of course the crying needs of poverty stricken women in our rural areas.

But I knew all along that it simply had to take place since the statement which you made this morning ladies, could not be smothered any longer.

By participating in such impressive numbers irrespective of your work load , you have sent out a clear message that women are well represented in practically every facet of organized endeavour in Namibia .

Over many years of oppressive prejudice and scepticism about women's abilities, women have steadfastly stayed the course to prove that we are equally endowed with mental capacities to deliver what our male counterparts can deliver.

Women have indisputably proven that their lesser physical abilities should by no means be equated with their intellectual competence.

I am therefore elated that you have answered to our call and that your seniors have kindly cooperated to allow you absence from your workstation to partake in the celebratory march.

The march was aimed at celebrating the fact that our Government has created the space within which women in Namibia could excel. We however also celebrate the fact that women have risen to the challenge of bravely performing in areas formerly totally dominated by our male counterparts.

As women we can be really proud of our gender who competently hold high offices in the Legislature, the Judiciary and the Executive, as well as in the Private Sector.

Women have been treated very unequally over many years in terms of differentiated salary scales for same the job with the same qualifications and experience and in terms of an unjustified preference for male employees for work which could be performed equally well by females.

We are steadily overcoming all those abstacles, just as we will overcome all the remaining ones.

Ladies, our demand is not an unreasonable one. We are just asking for equal treatment, equal representation and equal recognition in Namibia.

Our country's Constitution grants us equality before the law, so why should we settle for discriminatory treatment. Although women are in the majority in Namibia, we only ask for equal treatment with our male counterparts.

We just want to shake off the male perception that women are somewhat inferior in capabilities and for that reason obvious candidates to be discriminated against.

Ladies, this is an issue which we should rectify.

It is our task to change mindsets of parents, men in general and the community at large.

I just recently overheard a man saying: "What nonsense is this equality of employment opportunities. Think of all the boys who complete Grade 12 and would be looking for jobs" This was not a man in the street, but one holding high office.

It is clear ladies that we still have homework to do to change this type of thinking in order to secure a future for our girls in which they can perform and progress free from inhibiting male prejudice – a future in which their progress will only be limited by their own abilities or lack thereof and not by man made impediments.

If we want the next generation to be able to fully exploit the potential of each gender equally, we have to take a strong stance about this outmoded practice.

Each women is affected by discriminatory views about women and it has the potential of negatively affecting your daughter. For that reason ALL women should contribute in whatever way to secure gender equality in Namibia.

This will also have a positive spin-off on traditionalists who believe that their daughters should leave school early to work on the fields or to herd the cattle in order to allow their brothers to complete their schooling.

The last population census bears testimony to this phenomenon that girls' school enrolment is higher than that of boys as from school entry age up to an age which corresponds with their physical development to become useful in and around the house. Thereafter the number of boys prevails at school level up to the age of 24 for which the census provides.

The same tendency is reflected for rural and urban settings.

Parents in rural homes still largely practise this outdated cultural remnant and unfortunately it will still take some time for it to change.

I believe that the residents of the city has the educative responsibility to influence our rural countrymen and women to change the practice.

Ladies and Gentlemen the intention is not to incite women to stage street protests about equality. The idea is to make women aware of the still prevailing practice of gender inequality and to sensitise them about the implications for their daughters. If women are conscious of the need for their daughters to perform in a competitive field in their future adult life, they would not so easily withdraw them from schools or tertiary institutions before they have obtained a useful qualification.

The most impressive manner in which women can exert pressure for equal treatment is by demonstrating their expertise and their ability to produce work of a superlative nature to their employers and supervisors.

Our Government has created a conducive climate within which women can excell. It is therefore our challenge to take up the gauntlet and to meet the expectations of our employers or of the positions we occupy.

By not living up to expectations we provide justification to sceptics about women's abilities.

But ladies, let me use this occasion to express my warmest congratulations to all of you and to those ladies who have excelled into very senior positions, but who could not be here, for proving that your gender is no obstacle for you to produce work of quality.

I realize that you too have numerous roles to fulfill in your families besides the responsibilities of your occupation.

Congratulations that you succeed to be many in one and still retain your femininity and your splendour. Let us keep on performing at our best rate and prove that our input cannot be easily forfeited.

Even though our roles and opinions are often played down as "only that of a woman", the world cannot go without us .

(Ron, please don't again quote the Martin Luther quote her!)

To avoid the situation of less respect for women among men to continue, mothers have to start with the upbringing of their sons.

It is a long established cultural practice that boys are being served upon by their sisters. Boys hence develop a distorted sense of self-perception and a bloated ego about themselves.

Unfortunately mothers are responsible for this state of affairs and women are eventually those who suffer from an unrecognized evil that will one day look down upon the female gender.

I think it is just fair to expect from parents but mothers in particular to treat their sons and daughters absolutely equal and to rear them with a clear understanding of the equality of the genders and with a well inbedded sense of mutual respect for each other.

Let each of us contribute to eradicate the phenomenon of unequal treatment and gender bias so as to prevent the women of tomorrow to start life and a career from a disadvantaged position based on her gender.

I am looking forward to relegate this chapter in female development to the annals of history.

Ladies + Gentleman, I invite you to enjoy the rest of the programme with us.

Thank You.