

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**STATEMENT BY HON. NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH,
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER ON THE
OCCASION OF
THE NAMING OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS AND COOPERATION BUILDING TO THE
DR THEO-BEN GURIRAB BUILDING**

FEBRUARY 17, 2020

WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

Director of Ceremonies;

Professor Honorable Peter Katjavivi, Speaker of the National Assembly

Honorable Benhard Sibalatani, Chair of the National council

Madam Joan Guriras and family members

Honorable Ministers

Honourable Christine //Hoebes, Deputy Minister Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation

Honourable Deputy Ministers

Honorable Members of Parliament

Former Ministers of Foreign Affairs

Members of the Parliamentary Committee on International Relations

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Secretary to Cabinet

Members of Namibia Association of Retired Ambassadors

Senior Government Officials

Distinguished invited guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great joy that I welcome you all to this befitting occasion, of the naming of the Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation (MIRCO) building to one of the finest diplomats this continent has ever produced, Dr. Theopold-Benjamin Gurirab (Theo-Ben Gurirab). This is indeed a joyous occasion, the people of Namibia are our most precious resource and when they excel in life, it is important that we celebrate their achievements, for their achievements are integral to our national interests and nation building.

Furthermore, the occasion is befitting because we are continuing to honor a career and consummate diplomat who was larger than life. An individual whose mere presence could fill a room. On behalf of the Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation and on my own behalf, I would like to thank Honourable Saara Kuukongelwa-Amadhila, Right Honorable Prime Minister, and Honourable Stanley Simataa, Honorable Minister of Information & Communication Technology, for their concurrence to name this building after Theo-Ben, since they also have offices in this building. I also thank His Excellency, Dr. Hage G. Geingob, the President of the Republic of Namibia and the entire Cabinet for the decision to name this building, and any subsequent building that will house the Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation, after Theo-Ben Gurirab, the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Namibia.

Before I go further, let me explain why 17th February was chosen for this occasion. The idea was to have a date linked to Ben's life. His birthday is 23 January but that was too early from the seasonal break for arrangements to be made. We then ended up with the 17th of February, as that is the date he had chosen to mark his 80th Birthday in 2018.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is natural consequence to bestow this honor to Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab. Prior to independence, Dr. Gurirab served as SWAPO's Chief Representative to the United Nations and later as its permanent observer for fourteen years. He was entrusted with that high responsibility, for he was a seasoned diplomat and brilliant negotiator. This, he demonstrated when he was our spokesperson in various multilateral fora, where he tirelessly advocated for the independence of Namibia. Comrade Theo-Ben Gurirab served as Deputy Representative and Petitioner on Namibia to the United Nations and the Americas from 1964 to 1972. He served as Chief Representative of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) from 1972 – 1986, in that capacity he formed party of the SWAPO negotiating team with the Western Contact Group that led to the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 435. He helped engineer the transformation of SWAPO from a mere movement of petitioners, to a formidable national liberation movement with a well-groomed cadre of diplomatic representatives, who became the pioneers of Namibia's Foreign Service.

He was a member of the SWAPO Party Central Committee and Politburo since 1976 and served from 1986 to 1990 as its Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Throughout these years, he played a major part in negotiations leading to Namibia's independence. Elected in 1989 to Namibia's Constituent Assembly, Dr. Gurirab was one of the key drafters of the country's constitution and he rightfully became a Member of Parliament. He successfully negotiated the reintegration of Walvis Bay into Namibia in 1994 and the initialed agreement with regards to the Orange River boundaries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For over 50 years inclusively, Theo - Ben Gurirab was a critical player in the formulation of the SWAPO foreign policy, and at the helm of Namibia's foreign policy since our independence. He crafted and directed it with talent, diplomatic skills and assertiveness until he left the Ministry in 2002. As Foreign Minister, Dr. Gurirab was a figure of note at SADC, the OAU/AU, United Nations, the G77 and the Commonwealth amongst others. He was a pan - Africanist who not only talked about it but practiced it. He had a full understanding of the operations of the international system. Dr. Gurirab persistently reminded us at the Ministry of the importance of SADC, in the spirit of good neighborliness. He believed and advocated consistently for peace and development and African unity.

He was an ardent believer in inherent right for the Africa people to benefit from our own natural resources and shape our collective destiny. To demonstrate the point, at his last address to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2001 he stated and I quote “*We Africans must cease creating muddled waters for others to fish in.*” A profound statement indeed, which in my view summed up his vision of peace and development on the African continent as outlined in the AU Agenda 2063.

Today we cannot speak about the millennium development goals without invoking the name of Theo- Ben Gurirab as these were negotiated during his tenure as the 54th President of the General Assembly. Therefore he pioneered the current Sustainable Development Goals. He was passionate about sustainable development, democratic governance, environmental protection, gender equality, nuclear disarmament and detested the use of children in armed conflict. He presided over the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security” which marks its 20th anniversary in October this year. These are just some of the sterling achievements of this son of the Namibian soil.

Ladies and gentlemen

Naming a building after Dr. Gurirab is a national honor; we immortalize his memory and his legacy. However, keeping alive his dreams of an industrialized and prosperous Namibia is keeping alive his legacy. Let his

sterling stewardship and acumen in foreign policy continue to inspire us to take full advantage of the opportunities of globalization, and position our country so that she becomes an important player in the global political and economic agenda, to the benefit of our people and the world. To you the young and upcoming diplomats, this is your task to carry forward his torch.

To Meme Joan Guriras, the children and the entire Theo-Ben family, thank you for sharing him with us. The many hours spent in the office and traveling across the globe was time taken away from him spending quality time with you. Continue to carry his legacy in the best way you can. We thank you for your selfless contribution to our struggle for liberation and nation building efforts in your own right.

It is now my singular honor to officially declare the building hosting the Namibian Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation, the “Theo-Ben Gurirab building.

MAY THE LEGACY OF DR. THEO - BEN GURIRAB LIVE ON AND CONTINUE TO INSPIRE THE CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

I thank you.

