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STATEMENT

BY

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AT

THE 12TH PERMANENT FORUM
ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES

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Mr. Chairman

I join other distinguished delegates who have spoken before me in congratulating you on your election as the Chair of the 12th Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I would also like to assure you of my delegation's support and hope that you will guide our deliberations to a successful conclusion.

We commend the Economic and Social Council for the comprehensive reports provided under this agenda item and took note of the recommendation therein.

Mr. Chairman

Indigenous people across the globe have experienced invasion of their territories, and still face discrimination because of their distinctive cultures, identities and ways of life. In Namibia, the arrival of colonial settlers robbed the people of Namibia, including the San People who are the earliest inhabitants of Namibia, their land and severely disturbed their traditional way of life. As a result, the San people and other communities were pushed to the most inhospitable terrains in the country, mainly surviving on hunting and collecting wild fruits. This is by no means to apportion the blame, but merely to state a historical fact.

At independence in 1990, the government of Namibia inherited numerous challenges and skewed socio-economic conditions with a huge inequality gaps between communities. The independent government had to deal with burden of integrating the previously marginalized communities in the mainstream of social economy, and to address the negative psychological effects they suffered. Article 95 of the Namibian constitution obliged the government to actively promote and maintain the welfare of its all citizens by adopting policies aimed at ensuring that every Namibian citizen has a right to fair and reasonable access to public facilities and services in accordance with the law.

In adhering to the constitutional provision and in the quest to address the situation of the Indigenous Communities, the government established a San Development programme, under the office of the Prime Minister. This programme and many others are aimed at integrating San, Ovatie and

Ovatjimba Communities into the mainstream of the economy and bring them at par with the rest of the population.

Since its establishment, the programme has made considerable progress in the provision of land, housing, livestock, education and sensitization of these communities' rights. A substantive number of the San, Ovatie and Ovatjimba households have been resettled on government farms and communal lands, and are provided with continuous post-settlement support and services. There are other several projects that the San Development programme embarks upon to empower and improve the livelihood of these communities.

Mr Chairman,

For the benefit of this debate, I am going to limit my intervention on what the government has done with regard to the provision of quality education to these communities. Education has been identified as an essential tool for the self-development of indigenous peoples. It is one of the most appropriate tools to empower the present and future generations of indigenous peoples to overcome their social difficulties. The government of Namibia strongly believes that providing these communities with education will open many doors of opportunities and enable them to improve their social conditions without neglecting their culture. Therefore, education should be an instrument to harmonize social economic development and respect for culture and tradition.

To that effect, the government through the San Development Programme has established early childhood centres (ECDs), literacy programme and scholarships programme. In an effort to ensure and realize the objective of education for all, ECDs are established at every new settlement, to allow children of the resettled indigenous communities to attend school. The government has further launched a literacy pilot project targeting pensioners of 55 years and above to address the issues of illiteracy amongst the pensioners and ultimately help them to keep track on the grant they receive from the government as pensioners.

Additionally, the government excessively subsidizes schools with high number of indigenous communities and provides for their legitimate school related needs through the school development funds. Primary and secondary school learners from the indigenous communities are supported

with hostel fees, monthly allowance, transport fares, toiletries, while students at tertiary institutions are supported with tuition fees, hostel fees, monthly allowance and prescribed books for their studies. Back-to-school campaigns and facilitation/provision of accommodation to the students from those communities are also some of the government initiatives. Similarly, mobile schools and school feeding programs have been put in place in order to keep the children in school while preventing the disruption of the way of life of these nomadic communities.

Mr Chairman

The government has established several training programmes and developmental projects to equip women and girls, them with skills that will allow them to start income generating businesses. Needlework, bread making, tailoring, beekeeping, coffin making and aquaculture projects are some of the government initiatives to economically empower these communities. In an effort to preserve cultural agricultural methods, the government provided these communities with animals to plough their fields and seeds for gardening projects.

Mr Chairman,

It is worth mentioning that implementing all those programmes imposes a huge financial burden to the government. Given the enormous scope of the interventions required to alleviate the plight of the indigenous communities, more resources are needed to meet these challenges. Hence, the Namibia government calls upon partners and stakeholders to join hands toward this endeavor. Our generation has a historical responsibility to ensure that tradition and way of life for the indigenous people everywhere are preserved and passed from one generation to another. If we allow the rich culture of the indigenous people to extinct, history will reserve a harsh judgment on our collective failure.

I thank you!