

Dr Quinton van Rooyen's Speech at Unpacking SONA 2018

12 April 2018

1. I have digested and analysed the state of the nation address, and I realized, to my profound horror, that despite adverse economic conditions, this country was actually in pretty good shape! The State of the nation proved one thing beyond a doubt – this president and his team was turning plans into action.
2. But this state of the nation was also one other thing – it was an unmistakeable call to action for ordinary Namibians! While the President has done his damnest to try and pull this country back into shape, he should not be allowed to do so alone, and that fact was emphasized by yesterday's SONA.
3. We are an independent nation, and should act as such. We cannot claim independence if we behave dependant on foreign aid and feel entitled to pity from the international investor and development community. It's like a child moving out, yet still expecting pocket money for monthly expenses. We should make ourselves the preferred choice of foreign investment and development capital.
4. We should remember that no other president can today present his nation in a SONA like it was done yesterday. The United States has a president that did not win the

popular vote. Germany has a fourth-term chancellor – in Africa a four-term President is condemned! The Koreas have either a former president in jail, or a president for life, it seems.

5. In the world, societies seems to be at war with one another, yet here in Namibia, we elected a president by free and fair elections and he won 87% of the vote. His leadership was then contested by an inner party leadership congress, where he himself encouraged challenge from his life-long comrades like a true democrat. He then had his leadership confirmed by 80% of the delegates.
6. We now know that social media is abused as an amplifier for a vocal minority. This gives the impression of a public debate that in reality is only a shouting match by a few who compete for the attention of the fewer. This is a false democracy.
7. National problems are resolved by patriots and democrats who back up and build up institutions. A perfect example is the overreaction to NEEEF, resulting in threatening of closing of businesses and the general malaise that surrounded the business climate before the debate even started. In exchange for 25% equity, which is no longer a requirement, let's give 25% more effort to empower the disempowered.

8. I am still waiting for Namibian businesses to follow the leadership of the President and provide equity to employees, provide them a dignified wage, and enable all employees to live with a sense of self-worth. You cannot imagine what good it does to a company!
9. I similarly call on worker's unions, who are losing membership, due to retrenchments and infighting, to re-evaluate their approach to business. Businesses are not your enemies, they are your partners in profit! Unions should work with business to enable long-term employment and job creation, and not make unreasonable demands that cause business closures and distress to employees. I have never heard of successful businesses that fires top performing employees for no reason. However, many failures have tolerated bad employees.
10. The Global Entrepreneurship Index shows that Namibians are extremely innovative, but lack start-up skills, and the support of institutions. I'm therefore glad to note in the SONA that the SME Centre, Venture Capital Fund and Credit Guarantee Scheme under the guidance of Development Bank of Namibia, was established.
11. With the index ranking our people at 71% and institutions at 44%, I'm glad to see we're making an extra effort to halt our slide in our scores on the Ease of Doing Business Report via institutions such as the Business and Intellectual Property Authority.

12. When we as Namibians work against each other, we present a conflicting and unattractive picture to the investment world. We remain our own worst enemy. When we as Namibians cannot face our own challenges, we cannot expect investors to take any financial risk on our behalf.

13. When I listened to the SONA, I instinctively looked for evidence of inaction, and found none. I then wondered where the perception of inaction comes from. I have come to the conclusion that this is due to the constant factional infighting the president has to deal with, due to his inclusive approach to governance.

14. As founding chairman of our world-class constitution, his eagerness to achieve consensus amongst the entire populace is unfortunately his greatest weakness. It opens him up to and results in attacks upon both him and his family. I just wonder where all the so-called patriots of Namibia are, that should have protected the president as he extended his hands in friendship to all factions. A near-unanimous elected leader should not find daggers in his back, but rather friends supporting him in his quest for a better, just and equal Namibia.

15. Current and future presidents of Namibia should never again have to suffer this indignity. Our president should be given the space to focus his attention on national issues like the economy – to focus on his passion, namely the people of Namibia.
16. We cannot waste a whole first-term of presidents on confirming their mandate. If you think the president is on a wrong path, why not act like a true democrat and make yourself available as a presidential candidate, in the next election. Face the possibility of rejection, then only can you be called a brave Namibian.
17. Let us as Namibians focus more on rewarding success instead of casting suspicion on successful initiatives. We should not develop a 'Tall Poppy' syndrome, where we cut off the heads of those who stand above us, just so that we can feel equal. We should rather aim to become 'Tall Poppies' ourselves. This new phenomenon in Namibia is foreign to us as a culture, and seemingly infiltrated our society.
18. As I said before, this SONA was a loud call to action. But in reality, it's a last call to arms. We are on the battlefield of poverty eradication, and our weapons are wealth creation. We shouldn't look to follow someone – we have elected him! The Namibian people seem to think that they have no part to play after an election, but we are the people who have to make Harambee work.

19. President Geingob and his team created a framework for economic growth in spite of global economic adversity, the relentless attacks on his Presidency and person. We now need to make our vote count by empowering him to create the wealth needed to eradicate poverty and make Namibia a first-class investment destination.
20. The President has clearly not lost his faith in the Namibian Nation, as this SONA clearly shows. Let us show him that his faith in us, and our faith in one another, was not misplaced.
21. Thank you.