

REMARKS BY TOM K ALWEENDO (MP), NAMIBIA
LAUNCH OF GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR UNIVERSAL SOCIAL
PROTECTION
21 SEPTEMBER 2016, UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK

Let me thank the organizers for inviting us to participate in this important High Level event – the launch of the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection as a mean to achieving the SDGs.

In many of our countries we still grapple with the problem of having too many people who have no adequate access to basic needs such as food, sanitation and shelter. We still have families that are unable to send their children to school and those who cannot afford basic health services. It is therefore incumbent on all policy makers, both in the public and private sectors, to pay particular attention on how to assist the poor and the most vulnerable in our societies. This is even more urgent now given the global rise in inequality and social exclusion where an increasing number of people is being relegated to the fringe of society.

Namibia is no different from other countries where poverty and inequality is of concern. In addressing the phenomenon of poverty and inequality our President, H.E. Hage Geingob, has declared an outright war on poverty. Since his inauguration as Namibia's third President on the 21 March 2015, his clarion call has been to ensure that our socio-economic development agenda is focused on inclusiveness – where no one feels left out.

Namibia has an established social protection and safety nets system that has developed over the last 26 years since our independence. It is a system underpinned and born out of our conviction that says that the best way for us to grow as a Nation, is by uplifting each other and that we are only as strong as our weakest link. Our social safety nets system consists of a combination of non-contributory pensions and unconditional cash transfers.

For example, all Namibians over the age of 60 qualify for a monthly old-age pension, regardless of their income status. Currently we have over 35 000 beneficiaries of the old-age pension. This component of the system provides an essential livelihood to those who would otherwise not have any other source of income, especially the rural and urban poor.

Another important component of the system is the unconditional cash transfer to the orphans, the vulnerable children and those living with disabilities. This component of the system has over 205 000 beneficiaries. We also have a school feeding program where learners from vulnerable homes are provided with meals at school.

While it is of crucial importance for countries to provide social safety nets to the vulnerable members of society, it is probably even more important to continue addressing the root causes of the problem – unemployment. In most of our countries people are mostly poor because they are unemployed. Most of them never held a paid job all their lives. In the long run the problem of poverty – and therefore the need to provide for a social safety nets system – can only be fixed by creating meaningful jobs for the unemployed.

We, as individual countries and more importantly at the global level, need therefore to continue addressing the real causes of poverty and inequality. Among these will include the strengthening of governance in our economic and political institutions in order to create the necessary trust within societies. One way of achieving this – and by no means the only one - is by reinforcing transparency and accountability.

We also need to continue investing in our education systems where the emphasis is more on the production of high level skills that are relevant for the 21st century. Without relevant high level skills, it will be a near impossibility to transform the socio-economic landscapes that is needed in most of our countries.

Another area where we need to pay particular attention is how to enhance the equitable sharing of economic benefits brought about by globalization that we have witnessed over the last couple of decades. In this respect, it essential that we carefully re-examine the current international trading

system, especially its ability to promote a fairer international trade. The point here is that international trade can be an effective tool in the transformation of developing economies.

I would like to believe that these are things that are all in our reach, especially given the global commitment that was clearly demonstrated during the launch of the SDGs last year.

Namibia looks forward to be an active participant in the global effort to promote an effective and sustainable universal social protection to achieve the SDGs.