I was taken by surprise by a decision taken by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, ELCIN, which had barred political party flags and songs during funeral services in ELCIN churches. I am not at all questioning the authority of ELCIN. It has the right to take decisions as it sees fit. I respect that right.

But when such decisions have direct bearings on the very people ELCIN serves, there is absolute need for transparency so that the flock moves together with one shepherd, embracing another in the knowledge that while it is impossible to satisfy each and everybody, decisions must not just be fair. They must be seen to be fair to minimize misunderstandings and commotions.

In other words, communication is very crucial and it should be a one-way traffic. Well, Reverend Joel Awendo said the decision was not his alone, adding that it was taken by the church leadership. That fact was also confirmed by ELCIN Secretary General, Pastor Eliaikim Shaanika. Fair enough, I respect ELCIN’s right to take decisions at it sees fit.

What I find very strange and insensitive is the fact that a crucial decision like this one, which affects thousands of people, has been taken and was not properly communicated to make people aware of what their church leaders had decided. Murmurings which ensued in the Eengolo ELCIN church when Reverend Awendo made the shocking announcement are indicative of that serious lack of communication and transparency.

I am not going into the merits and demerits of the decision, but the timing was awkward in that ELCIN waited until a SWAPO Party member had died to make the announcement, which caught many people by surprise. Why did ELCIN wait until someone was dead to make the announcement? This was a drastic decision which was supposed to be announced in a normal church service where there was no death.

Here were bereaved family members who were mourning one of their dearest, and who had prepared the last journey of the late Comrade Joseph Shikuwa Katofa the way he would have wanted it to be done, only to be humiliated in public by being asked to remove the SWAPO Party flag from Katofa’s coffin without any degree of sensitivity. Is that the best way church leaders should counsel members of their congregations in times of difficulties? Death is painful and I could imagine the situation in which relatives of the late Katofa, as he was affectionately, had found themselves at the moment when the announcement was made.

This was the highest disregard of the pain and difficult times those relatives were going through, the highest degree of insensitivity. If Comrade Katofa were to come back today to witness what his church had done to him in death, he would be shock to shake his head in disbelief. What if that was his will? And we say the will of the dead should be honoured? With the highest and greatest respect I have for church leaders and the truth were to be told, the Church erred on this score and owed the Katofa family an apology for being insensitive to their difficult and mourning times. Had the decision been announced publicly before and Comrade Katofa’s relatives still brought his coffin wrapped in a SWAPO Party flag, that could have been a different situation as it could have been seen as defying a church decision. But this, unfortunately, was not the case.

What informed the decision anyway? As far as I know, I have never seen Namibians fighting over flags at funeral services since independence. Could one imagine burying liberation legends like the late Nathaniel Koehandjo-Okalongo’s head, “that is rubbish” and drinking water like an elephant? After all, it is a nations. United we stand divided we fall. THEIR BLOOD OUR FREE-

I.H.Hebandjio-Okalongo

Street vendors are ordinary persons and no one should be humiliated in public by being asked to remove the SWAPO Party flag from their coffins. Today, we owe a lot to our brothers and sister in the neighboring countries including Cuba and his leadership that today we are a nations. United we stand divided we fall. THEIR BLOOD OUR FREE-DOM!!!!!!!

Kleo Okalongo

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What informed the decision anyway? As far as I know, I have never seen Namibians fighting over flags at funeral services since independence. Could one imagine burying liberation legends like the late Nathaniel Maxuilli, Moses Garoeb, Dimo Amaambu, Ruben Danger Ashipala and many others without singing a liberation song?

These people’s lives were spent in the crucible of the struggle, dodging bullets and going for days without food. The aim was independence, which we enjoy today. SWAPO to them is what the Bible is to a Christian. Martin Luther pulled out of the Catholic Church because he did not agree with some of the decisions Pope Leo X was making.

Had he been quiet about the teachings of Pope Leo X, there could have been no Lutherans today. What it tells us is that people should not just be told about decisions, but they must also be told why a particular decision was made and its timing at an appropriate platform. Namibia faces many challenges for us to be worried about flags on coffins. Above all, let leaders lead through communication to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation of decisions and policies.