Reclaiming Africa – unplugged, unedited and uncensored Part 2

Keynote Speech by Dr Tobie Aupindi

At the event of the Ongwediva Annual Gala Dinner marking 10 years of the Ongwediva Annual Trade Fair

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I stand here today honored by this invitation and mindful of the immense responsibilities you take as you strive to grow the future economic prospects of this town and this country at large. I am thankful and humbled by this honor bestowed on me by the Council and its CEO to share with this gathering a few words. I congratulate the Ongwediwa Town Council for this great achievement. I am equally excited and proud to be invited back home to share my knowledge and skills with my people.

Africa has been described as a dark continent because of its’ inability to deliver the much needed economic emancipation to its people. In terms of Economic benefits and prosperity though, Namibia remains economically colonized and to a large extent the indigenous Namibians remain only spectators. We do not own much of the economic benefit derived from our country. This is because of the past colonial legacies that have divided a nation for more than a century. These past injustices said that when you were white you were right. While it is true to say we are free today, some of these past injustices are still evident today as relics of the past. You will find out soon enough that economic independence is yet to come.

The era of economic slavery and pluralisation is among us. Many of the systems we fought against are slowly coming back through another route called globalization! This time however they have not returned with a gun and a bible in their hands, but with money and lots of it, as well as fancy economic jargon such as **rural economic development, empowerment, social investments** etc. Yes, the first world has come back to do exactly what they have been doing over the last 300 years – to extract resources from our lands and depending on our action our people are being left with nothing.
And we have allowed them to do this – we truly have. While we were busy celebrating our independence we’ve sat back and allowed them to take advantage of questionable and outdated laws and take charge of million dollar projects in our communal areas, property estates on prime land all over the country, mining and tourism; and control of our import & export market. In some African countries millions of people have been misplaced by political unrest. The last true colonies in Africa were Namibia and South Africa yet we have ongoing tribal conflict orchestrated by those who sow seeds of hatred in order to exploit Africa’s mineral and natural wealth.

And we turn on each other and are at each other’s throats, it becomes brother against brother, Africans versus Africans, while our Natural wealth is being exploited and only benefitting the few. It is these fears that surround us today, which have removed us from the path of self discovery, self appreciation, self confidence and self respect. It is indeed that type of fear which has made many black people to have a negative self perception of being VICTIMS rather than see themselves as VICTORS. Our political power will mean absolutely nothing if it does not shift the economy in our favour.

This particular perception lead to blacks going out there to a large extend only looking for a job, while many of our white and Asian counterparts go out and look for a business. We must go out and create wealth through a sustainable career. I therefore advise you to go out and look for a business not a job. Even if you get a job, to you it must only be a temporary measure. Our generation needs NOW to deliver Economic emancipation. We need to become ‘economic warriors’ that are going to take on the systems that are taking resources from our country without empowering our people or adding value to our economy. We need to provide our country with global solutions of economic restructuring and to invest in our economic infrastructure in
order for this economy to respond to our needs as people of this country.

The process of change management, leadership and succession must shift towards creating a knowledge based economy. Because we must continuously see Namibia, not from within but from the global perspective otherwise we will not attain global competitiveness.

We need a paradigm shift, from believing that when one of our own becomes a millionaire rightfully, its’ a crime. The success of these new generation Namibian millionaires came about after they refused to give up anyway. Therefore we need to use these few men and women and their success to inspire our youth into believing that they too can make it. **I can guarantee you that if nothing happens in terms of economic transformation, an economic revolution and confrontation is eminent.** ACC an institution created by our SWAPO Party Government to combat corruption has now become an ‘African Corruption Commission’ only focusing on investigating black people. One could have expected that since the black community only accounts for about 10% of the economy, then most of the cases they are dealing with could have been 90% in those who have the economy. This is anarchy.

Ladies & Gentlemen, we need to reclaim our country’s pride, resources and image. We just need to apply ourselves and take a common step forward. Over the last 100 years the black race has not only had their resources taken away from them but there has also been an attempt to remove our sense of purpose. They have not succeeded because evidently here we still stand. We should choose to be employers and strive to be successful businessmen and women, as this is the only way we
can arrest the current problems of unemployment in our country.

They say that for a plant to grow into a strong tree one needs to nurture it from the time it is small with water, fertilizer and the right combinations of soil, temperature and sunshine. The same concept applies to a strong business personality. To grow successful business personalities we need to enhance our Education system so that it produces school leavers and graduates that have a holistic and realistic outlook and understanding of the global, regional and Namibian economic systems and processes. This is where our Education and apprenticeship system comes in.

The failure of many of our businesses initiated by our people normally comes down to issues of impractical and foreign business paradigms which to a large extent have been encouraged by our Education system. To merely teach our scholars about British and American economic systems and corporate governance structures does very little to make them understand the uniqueness and complexities of our own system. Africa’s reality is different to Europe’s and North America’s and it should therefore be reflected in the ways we groom our future business leaders. They should be ready to venture into the business world knowing the difference between Western Books vs. African Reality, The Superficial World vs. The Real World.

Resources are a vital element for the business planning process and without them a business will fail to materialise. It pains me to see facilities such as agriculture and business loans which are meant to help prospective entrepreneurs raise the capital necessary to finance their businesses turn out to be the same institutions whose rigid criteria and requirements
continue to discriminate on our people because of our poor economic standing. If a loan facility can only give loans to rich people then what is it good for? Does that mean that if I don’t have collateral then I am not going to be a successful businessman? Is this kind of neo-imperialism really what our mothers and fathers sacrificed their lives and youth for?

The system is so imperfect that some of these financial institutions that take all our money in billions of dollar deposits are quick to give a previously disadvantaged person a N$600,000 loan to buy a car, but if you need to borrow N$600,000 to create your own business, they find all sorts of reasons to refuse you that money. They ask you “do you have security or collateral?” Simple economics will tell you that if you are loaning out money to two people, where one is going to buy a car, while the other one is going into the property market or mining, your money is more at risk with the one buying a car. Why can’t the same arrangement work in either transaction? This is anarchy, racism and a system designed to keep us down. This has created a global economic imbalance leaving Africa and its people behind. Well I say this is simply unacceptable and a betrayal of the many sacrifices made by those who died fighting for our country.

So then why can’t we in the same context address our development challenges in our own Namibian way rather than adopting western systems of education, western systems of banking, western systems of insurance and western systems of investments? Does this not mean that we’re colonising ourselves all over again? Africa is the cradle of man’s origins and the richest continent on earth (in terms of both resources and culture). Yet we are the poorest, why? Is this not the real world? Then what is stopping us from completely removing the remnants of our colonizers and seeking realistic Namibian ways
of looking at the problems that surround us and finding realistic solutions?

We worry ourselves with the wrong things such as complaining about the Chinese businesses. You know what? The Chinese economy is the fastest growing economy in the world. Even in the biggest cities in the world you will find China towns with millions of people. The ironic thing is that the same previously advantaged members of community who are complaining about the Chinese businesses seem to be saying, “the Chinese must not colonize these people, that’s for us do.”

The question is not about these people or the Chinese; it’s about the leadership we are providing to our economic structures. Why can’t the business community summon the local SWAPO structure to put a moratorium on selling land to foreigners? I was here during last year’s campaign and I have seen that our SWAPO Party was re-elected with the assistance from the local business community, it is therefore upon you to safeguard the implementation of the SWAPO Party election manifesto. If the leadership in the various structures is not instituting the changes to help our local business leaders, which is what we voted for then you should summon them before the business community platform and demand full accountability. Don’t just treat them with kid gloves as if you owe them anything. If anything has to be said is that they owe us a great deal.

In order to succeed in your business endeavours you should be ready to continuously market and brand your products. Branding gives your business identity and recognition without even having to introduce yourself. You have to adopt marketing techniques that work for you in relation to your target market and position your product so that your customers can easily
gain access to it. The annual Ongwediva Trade Fair is a brilliant opportunity for this.

A critical part of running a successful business is customer service. Make sure that clients leave happy or else you’ll never see them at your establishment again. To all business owners that have Sales representatives that still treat customers with attitude and disdain, please remind them that in the service culture – “the customer is king”.

Thirdly, my black people – we need to move away from this existing self-depreciating custom where everyone is just selling alcohol. It is a despicable tradition and speaks volumes of our inability to think outside the box. Instead I would like to urge you to consider forming strategic partnerships. I know that us black people always want to do everything on our own, but think of the biggest companies in the world – and you will realise that they are all formed through partnerships. Think of the Pupkewitz Group (Toyota, Nissan, Megabuild) or Times & Warner Bros – Microsoft, Virgin, the list is endless. We should learn to think BIG rather than everyone owning their own LITTLE businesses that sell the same goods or services. The plus side to forming a conglomerate is that you capture a larger market, period.

Through this all we remain humble, strong-willed and hopeful. This is our time, this is our moment. And because we can achieve much bigger things no matter the circumstances I believe “there is no chance and no fate that can circumvent or hinder or control the firm resolve of our determined soul”.

Thank you very much!