Keynote Speech by Dr. Elijah Ngurare, Secretary of SPYL at the National Arts Extension Programme (NAEP) Arts Festival 2010, Windhoek, on 27 September 2010

Director of Ceremonies
Mr. Lucky Pieters
Distinguished invited guests
Students of NAEP
Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for the invitation extended to me to deliver a keynote speech on this exciting Arts Festival. Above all, distinguished guests, my presence here is in solidarity with the students and staff of the National Arts Extension Programme (NAEP) who are heroically committed to the development of arts in our country. Further and right at the onset, I should like to say that my only wish is that the words we speak here today shall not gather dust but that they shall be implemented by the relevant Government structures.

Congratulations to the organisers of this Arts Festival. As I was preparing for my speech, the first question I asked myself was: What is Art? I think Art can be defined as “…the product or process of deliberately arranging symbolic elements in a way that influences and affects the senses, emotions, and/or intellect. It encompasses a diverse range of human activities, creations, and modes of expression, including music, literature, film, photography, sculpture and paintings”. The relevant question to ask at this point is how does this definition apply to Namibia and is it being implemented and if not how do we intend operationalising this particular definition?

Fortunately, as can be seen, this Arts Festival has attracted students more than any other group of exhibitors. In other words majority of the students are young people. I am informed that the student exhibition will have arts work from Rehoboth, Kalkrand, Tsumeb, Eenhana, Oshakati, Ongongo, Rundu, Outapi and Windhoek. I want to applaud the hard work of your staff members and students, Mr Pieters. Indeed, teaching art to the youth is one of the most valuable gifts we can give to our children at household level, school level and societal level respectively.

At household level, the parents should also be arts teachers to mould and prepare the young minds. At school level, government should deliberately create an environment that infuses pride of arts in the minds of our learners. At societal level our media particularly radio and television must jealously ensure that Namibian modes of expression including music, literature, film, photography, sculpture and paintings are widely promoted for the benefit of our young people’s artistic development.

I am therefore pleased that Mr. Pieters and his team are committed to training these young people in appreciation of their artistic talents. Indeed, I applaud the College of the Arts for providing the best art education to as many Namibians, young and old, through the National Arts Extension Programme with over 4000 students and 75 part-time staff members. As slogan of the College of Arts goes “Life long learning through the arts”.

Mr. Pieters, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Many of us present here are experts of art in one way or another. Some are musicians in their own right or actors etc. Clearly, arts, is something that stimulates an individual's thoughts, emotions, beliefs, or ideas through the senses. It is also an expression of an idea and it can take many different forms and serve many different purposes.

It is these thoughts, emotions and beliefs or ideas that must be alive in the senses of our youth. Our appreciation of arts and culture must be planted in the minds and deeds of our young people. This is because, our youth must be the Weapons Against Cultural and Media Imperialism. But, without clear ideological education, our young people can also be weapons of mass destruction that would invade our artistic development and national identity if we become indifferent as a society towards clear and present danger of cultural imperialism. We must therefore appeal to our friends and comrades in the media particularly Television and Radio, they need to transform these media outlets into classrooms for the advancement of Namibian arts and culture. Where there is Hollywood let us aspire for Namlihood and Afrohood; where there is foreign music let us aspire to appreciate our own musicians etc. I therefore appeal to students of NAEP to continue being firm so that you can become grounded with the African roots in the fertile soil of arts and culture.

In this regard, the Directorate of Arts should mirror the format of the Directorates of Culture and of Sports respectively especially by ensuring that the directorate emulates the success of its sister directorates and start arts clubs/programmes in schools that will develop into regional arts festivals. Within NAEP, we wish to appeal that our actors, directors and stage managers should benefit from a reasonable minimum wage and social security benefits respectively. This is of necessity must also include a proposal for a change in the formula of arts funding to be introduced that will guarantee equal opportunity to all our artists.

Director of Ceremonies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to avail of this opportunity to make an important point in regards our artists in general. In my view, the time to appreciate and acknowledge our artists is when they are alive and not only at their funerals.

One of the challenges I see facing our artists is that there is not enough market within Namibia to appreciate the talents and creativity of our artists at all levels. Thankfully NBC and other media outlets are trying their best but not enough. Perhaps the way forward is for a deliberate intervention to be made by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology to enact a law to compel all radio and television stations to play more than 80% of local music along the lines adopted by Canada and France in recent years. Furthermore, all television programmes should have a quota for locally produced programmes. At the same time, the MICT should also engage the community radio stations such as Base FM etc to assess their capacity and areas of need in order for them to assist our local artists.
I therefore strongly make the following recommendations that:

1. It may also be helpful that an Arts Fund be set up in order for all international donor agencies including embassies and government or State owned enterprises to make a contribution thereto for the benefit of all artists.

2. At the school levels this could require that a small levy (e.g. N$2.00) to be added to each school fund for arts activities only.

3. The Katutura Community Arts centre and National Arts Extension Programme should, as per definition, accelerate community development programmes.

4. The radio and television media outlets especially the NBC should create a programme for arts education alongside culture and religion.

5. Ongoing training should be encouraged for previously disadvantaged citizens to upgrade their work. It is equally imperative that after completing their studies these Namibians must be absorbed as full time lecturers in the structures of the College Of The Arts.

6. The tendency of extended periods of volunteerism should have limits. I am shocked to learn that some of the arts facilitators of the National Arts Extension Program are not employed full time since 1995. We appeal to the line Ministry and the workers union to resolve this matter speedily.

7. Government, through the line Ministry particularly the Directorate of Arts, should ensure that this Arts Festival becomes an annual event and funded by Government.

8. We call on Namibian artists together with the Namibia Film Commission to develop the Namibian film industry (on a lighter note it could be called Namlhood) and showcase our way of life in villages etc.

9. All of us in the youth fraternity, we want the Minister, Cde Kazenambo Kazenambo and Deputy Minister, Cde Pohamba Shifeta to succeed as political heads of that youth ministry. Therefore, we appeal to all staff members of the Ministry Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture to ensure that all their efforts as government employees should be geared towards the success of all youth related activities of our Ministry responsible for the youth.

10. Everyone in attendance please put your hands together and congratulates Cde. Lucky Pieters for making this event a monumental and memorable success and congratulations to the NAEP students and staff members.

I thank you.