



The Chamber of Mines of Namibia

Speech at the Inauguration of the NIMT Southern Campus on March 20,
2009, in Keetmanshoop

By

Otto N. Shikongo



President of the Chamber of Mines of Namibia

Director of Ceremonies,

Your Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of
Namibia,

First Lady Madam Penehupifo Pohamba,

Hon. Nangolo Mbumba, Minister of Education,

Traditional Authorities of the Karas Region,

All Ministers and Members of Parliament present here,

Hon. Dawid Boois, Governor of the Karas Region,

Your Worship the Mayor & Councilors of Keetmanshoop,

All other Councilors,

Mr. Nicky Oppenheimer, Chairman of De Beers & Namdeb,

The Executive Director of NIMT, Mr. Eckhart Mueller & NIMT Staff,
Council Members of the Chamber of Mines (CoM),
Members of the media,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies & Gentlemen,
(All protocols observed).

The Chamber of Mines is greatly honoured to be represented here today at this historic occasion in the development of NIMT. The inauguration of the Southern Campus here in Keetmanshoop marks a major milestone in the history of NIMT & the development of technical skills in Namibia. With the successful opening of the Northern Campus in Tsumeb barely 2 years ago, NIMT has expanded its capacity in response to technical skills requirements, particularly in the mining industry.

It is public knowledge that the mining industry has been affected badly by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) with the resultant crash of mineral commodity prices on international markets. Our mining industry has gone into survival mode, reviewing plans & employing cost cutting measures to stay afloat. Unfortunately, in some cases measures included retrenchment of workers as a last resort to save companies from total collapse.

However, in the midst of all this, there is a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel in terms cushioning the social impact of job losses. The Uranium industry has largely been less affected except for the impacts on availability

of finance for large projects but is holding on to a path of growth. Luckily, the prices of Uranium oxide have been less affected than others by the GFC & hence the Uranium boom continues, particularly in the Erongo Region. With the granting of 2 Mining Licences by the MME, 2 new Uranium mines are scheduled to be constructed this year, with more to follow in the near future.

Testimony to this commitment is the current construction of the first desalination plant in Namibia at the coast which is expected to be commissioned later this year to supply water to the new mines. I am therefore confident that the new Uranium mines will go along way to mitigating the recent job losses as they will provide jobs to some retrenched workers.

Let me take this opportunity to inform this gathering that the Chamber of Mines & the Mine Workers Union of Namibia have reached an Agreement through the Mining Consultative Forum, that, **should there be any job losses at any mine, details of employees affected would be made available to the Chamber of Mines for circulation to the rest of the mining industry to absorb the available skills as applicable.** This process is currently ongoing.

Director of Ceremonies,

NIMT plays a special role in the mining industry. Having been donated by Rössing Mine to the Government at Independence, NIMT has continued to play its important role in skills development in Namibia. The success of our

industry can be attributed partly to the role of NIMT & over the last few years, the Chamber of Mines made a deliberate decision to incorporate the Executive Director of NIMT, Mr. Eckhart Mueller, into the Council of the CoM. This way, we established closer relationship & the Chamber of Mines is able to get first hand information on requirements of NIMT in terms of bursaries, lab equipment & student attachments to our mining industry.

You will recall that not long ago & at the height of the last mining boom, we were experiencing a critical shortage of skills in all technical fields. In order to address the challenge, the CoM initiated in late 2006 a skills audit in the mining industry that included the requirements at our line Ministry, the MME. The skills audit report was submitted in early 2007 with recommendations on the way forward. Based on this report, & after careful consideration & consultation, the Council of the CoM agreed on three strategies to resolve the acute skills shortages as follows:

- a) **Firstly:** Increase artisan training by sponsoring 30 apprentices to De Beers Technical School in Kimberly while NIMT was developing capacity to train more locally. This strategy was implemented at the beginning of last year & selected students were enrolled during August 2008.

- b) **Secondly:** Recruitment of “qualified” artisans who had graduated from other Vocational Training Centers (VCT’s) who were roaming the streets without jobs. A total of 250 artisans were recruited &

handed over to NIMT for upgrading of their qualifications so that they would easily be absorbed into the mining industry. Unfortunately, standards from VTCs & NIMT are not the same much to the disadvantage of students from these Government Institutions. I am pleased to note that through the newly created Namibia Training Authority, this problem will be resolved so that an artisan from NIMT or any VTC should have the same qualification with same high standards as currently obtainable at NIMT. In this respect, the mining industry is fully committed to the concept of a training levy that has been introduced in the new Vocational Education & Training Act of 2008. We hope that once operational, funds collected under the training levy system will be used effectively to upgrade training standards at all VTCs.

- c) **And Thirdly:** The Chamber of Mines committed itself to assist with the expansion of NIMT capacity through the establishment of NIMT Southern Campus here in Keetmanshoop. I am pleased to announce that the CoM has been associated with this historic development right from the beginning. The CoM decided that NIMT should conduct a business plan to identify the financial needs of turning the available disused GRN facilities into a NIMT campus. The study identified the capital requirement & through the Chamber of Mines, a total of N\$5.5 million was raised from individual mines /companies as follows:

➤ Skorpion Zinc: N\$1.5m – *Represented here by Mr. Dave Bentley*

- Rosh Pinah Zinc Corporation: N\$1.5m – *Represented by Mr. Kondja Kaulinge*
- Namdeb: N\$500 000 – *Represented here by Mrs. Inge Zaamwani-Kamwi*
- Okorusu Mine: N\$500 000 - *Represented here by Mr. Imanuel Djiuella*
- De Beers Namibia Fund: N\$ 1.5m. *Represented here by Mr. Nicky Oppenheim & Mr. Daniel Kali.* Of note is that the De Beers Namibia Fund contribution is in addition to the N\$2m already contributed to the establishment of the NIMT Northern Campus in Tsumeb.

Many more CoM members contributed in kind by way of donating equipment & machinery for practical training. I take this opportunity to thank all the donors for their generous contributions both financially & in kind. Their contribution & together with the support from the Ministry of Education have turned a dream into reality. It is indeed an appropriate independence anniversary gift not only to NIMT, but also to the Karas Region.

Director of Ceremonies,

I would like to end my statement by reaffirming the commitment of the mining industry to skills development. Although the industry is currently going through turbulent times, we have not lost our focus on the need for investments in skills development.

No one can predict when this economic downturn will come to an end, but one thing is certain, we shall rise again to contribute to the national

development on a bigger scale. We therefore believe that the expansion of NIMT as we are witnessing today is an exciting development & a worthwhile investment for skills development of Namibia.

I thank you

& happy independence celebrations.