



**SPEECH**

**BY**

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**AT**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF  
POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA'S  
ACADEMIC YEAR**

**WEDNESDAY, 10<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2010**

**WINDHOEK**

***RE-THINKING COMPETITIVENESS FOR SOCIO-  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT***

Honourable Nangolo Mbumba, Minister of Education  
Mr. Oloff Munjanu, Chairperson of the Polytechnic Council  
Esteemed Members of Council of the Polytechnic of Namibia  
Esteemed Members of Senate, Faculty and Staff Members  
Esteemed Students  
Distinguished Invited Guests  
Members of the Media  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am greatly honoured to extend a warm welcome to you all at the opening ceremony of the 15<sup>th</sup> academic year of the Polytechnic of Namibia. It has been fifteen years of wonderful progress, transformation, innovation and capacity building. So we have every reason to celebrate this academic year as it is indeed customary to celebrate life in quantities of five years or decades. Honourable Minister, we are very pleased and privileged to have you with us at the inception of a new academic year, and we trust you have the confidence in the Polytechnic to deliver the quality and quantity to make Namibia the winning nation.

When the Polytechnic Act was signed into law in November 1994, many of today's freshmen were about four or three years, or even one year old. Today, we all join hands as community of scholars and students to achieve the goals of life with better intellectual capacity.

In doing so, I want to sincerely recognise the contributions which have been made over the years by the Polytechnic team – academic and administrative staff, as well as students – to make this institution what it is today: *the university of first choice in Namibia*.

This year we shall again educate and graduate students in different fields of study, signifying that they are ready and well equipped to take the helm Namibia, or anywhere in the world, with the required *capacity and confidence*, as defined by their *knowledge, skills and competences*. I therefore congratulate my colleagues and our students, as well as all the stakeholders, for continuing to raise the bar of excellence, and for driving our institution to ever greater heights!

This morning I am so pleased to see so many first-year students, or *freshmen* as they are known internationally. One can easily recognise them by their shy, yet excited and determined expressions, ready to unlock their full potential here at the Polytechnic. I want to assure you that the Polytechnic has a proud record of accomplishment and many, many awards for its excellent applied programmes. Our graduates have been tried and tested and are sought after in the job market, as you will discover before or after you graduate. Our pledge to you is that we will continue to deliver high quality programmes that are relevant to national needs, in line with market requirements, and aligned with your and society's high expectations!

At the same time, though, I have to remind you that your admission to the Polytechnic marks you as a very special student. Remember that there are several thousand other young men and women who desperately wanted, but failed to gain admission to the Polytechnic, for whatever reason. This places a responsibility on you to seize this opportunity with both hands and make the very best of it. When you start to waiver, just remember that a lost opportunity never returns! Be diligent in every respect, starting with regular class attendance and delivery by schedule.

Fifteen years ago, the Polytechnic enrolled about 2 500 students. In 2009, we registered more than 11 000 students and graduated 1 439 students in different disciplines at different levels. For this Academic Year, we received 13 000 applications for admission – significantly more than last year's total student population. Sadly, we were only able to admit about 5 000 new students. This underlines the importance of education in the economy and the prominence of the Polytechnic in our society and the popularity of our programmes.

Indeed, this confirms the excellent reputation the Polytechnic now enjoys, both locally and far afield. Since the advent of the Public Management Review Africa survey in Namibia in 2002, we have won the *Golden Arrow* awards in higher education, and have topped it up last year with the *Diamond Arrow*. These are indeed achievements we and the Namibian nation are proud of.

Consequently, I am proud to welcome you to our fine university. As we engage the year, let us reflect on the theme: “*Re-thinking Competitiveness for Socio-Economic Development*”. By this theme, we want to engage the Polytechnic community and society at large in a dialogue that will help to reshape our ways of thinking and doing things. Life in Namibia cannot be business as usual. According to the **2009/2010 Global Competitiveness Index**, Namibia is not doing well in many respects, especially in education and innovation indicators. I therefore challenge every member of the Polytechnic community to rethink their current and future position in our economy as well as in the world economy. The better we perform on the indicators, the better our standard of living. It is important to know that economic activities in the *new economy* involve mainly *knowledge workers*, and here I am talking about professors, analysts, IT experts, technologists, engineers, managers, marketing experts, medical scientists, surveyors, architects, financial and investment experts, designers, researchers, architects, and innovators in every domain. Knowledge workers are valued for their curiosity, creativity and problem-solving capabilities, for their ability and willingness to offer valuable inputs and innovate. They are the ones actively and constantly investigating and devising ways of improving quality, reducing costs, decreasing cycle times, extending the value chain, more efficiently employing technology, and innovating all the time.

In advanced economies such as most European countries, Japan and the US, it is estimated that more than 60% of the workers are knowledge workers. If we are to achieve our objective of one day being at the same level of development as these countries, as outlined in *Vision 2030*, we shall have to emulate them by dramatically increasing our educational output of knowledge workers! There is no greater determinant of success in this regard than the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce - these have become the key weapons of competitiveness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Therefore, Ladies and Gentlemen, an academic institution must play a key role in development, for it offers expertise across disciplines and produces new talent – the new breed of thinkers and workers required in every economy. On this particular score, the Polytechnic has always risen to the occasion, without fail!

Let me conclude by once again, and from the bottom of my heart, welcome each and every one of you to the Polytechnic community. I wish you all the very best throughout the year as we make our contribution to make Namibia a competitive nation. I thank you all for your kind attention!

Notes:

1. Abdulai David N. et al, Malaysia and the K-Economy, 2001, Pelanduk Publications
2. Ohmae K, The Next Global Stage: Challenges and Opportunities in Our Borderless World ,2005, Pearson Education, Inc. New Jersey
3. Ramphela M, Laying the Ghosts to Rest: Dilemmas of the transformation in South Africa, 2008, Tafelberg, South Africa
4. The World Economic Forum, The Global Competitiveness Report (2009/2010)