**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO CLAIMS OF ANCESTRAL LAND RIGHTS AND RESTITUTION**

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**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**15 May 2019**

**All Media
WINDHOEK**

**NAMIBIA**

**JUDGE SHAFIMANA UEITELE – CHAIRPERSON**

Fellow Commissioners,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

As it is already public knowledge, His Excellency Dr. Hage G. Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, has appointed, and announced the Commission of Enquiry into Claims of Ancestral Land Rights and Restitution on 21 February 2019.

This appointment was subsequent to the resolutions of the Second National Land Conference, which was held from 01 to 05 October 2018. The Conference inter alia, resolved on the “establishment of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on Ancestral Land to, amongst others:

* Generate a common understanding/consensus on the definition of ancestral land rights and restitution;
* Commission a survey/study to identify communities who have lost ancestral land;
* Establish the sizes of ancestral land lost and boundaries;
* Study to determine the limit of the pre-independence ancestral claims; and
* Identify alternative restorative measures to restore social justice and ensure economic empowerment of the affected communities.’’

A considerable time was spent since its appointment to finalize its Work Plan, including defining key activities and deliverables, timeframes, and other operational plans. Against this background, the Commission is ready to commence with its work of engagements with the public in the fulfilment of its mandate.

The purpose of this media briefing is to firstly, inform the Namibian public that the Commission has been hard at work preparing for the roll-out of the assignment. Secondly, to invite members of the public to participate in the work of the Commission with the objective to contribute to resolving the land question in Namibia, as it relates to ancestral land claims and restitution.

The Commission is conscious of this huge national responsibility, but is of the conviction that Namibians have the capacities and determination to resolve challenging national questions. The drafting and adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia by the Constituent Assembly, through the process of consensus, is an example of the Nation’s determination to resolve difficult questions.

Furthermore, the Commission has the honour to inform the Nation that it has started a process of confidence building, consultations with the stakeholders such as; Honourable Governors, Regional Councillors, leaders of political parties, traditional leaders, civil society organisations and farmers and workers’ unions. The purpose is to introduce the Commission, and to exchange views on the appropriate modalities for executing its mandate.

The first round of consultations was conducted from 6 to 10 May 2019. These included courtesy calls on political parties, Windhoek-based civil society organisations, religious organisations, some Traditional Authorities and other relevant stakeholders. The Commission will meet other stakeholders for the same purpose before the regional visits scheduled for June and July 2019.

Taking into account its terms of reference, the Commission hereby invites written submissions by individuals, groups, communities and other experts starting from **20 *May until 21 June 2019.*** Written submissions to the Commission must be prepared in English, if possible, or any other language approved by the Secretary. If and where possible, be typewritten or word-processed, and must bear the name, address and telephone or fax number or email of the author. The submission must be a response to the Terms of Reference as gazetted, including Ancestral Land Claims. In the case of Ancestral Land Claims, the claimant must state the name of the claim, provide background information and evidence to the claim, and make recommendations regarding how restitution regarding the claim should be addressed.

Written submissions should be addressed to:

Commission of Enquiry: Ministry of Land Reform

C/o Secretary to Cabinet

Office of the Prime Minister

Private Bag 13338

Windhoek

Telephone: +264-61-435407

Fax: +264-61-435444

The Commission is expected to commence with ***Regional visits*** on ***17 June to 19 July 2019.*** Public hearings will be conducted in all 14 Regions of Namibia. The Commission is also in the process of putting together thematic research experts entrusted with archival, historical and legal documentary reviews, site visits and conducting interviews with key informants.

The Commission has also developed a Media Plan to facilitate regular communication with the public through the media about its work, and to continuously invite the public to participate in the Commission’s activities.

The Commission has a tight schedule to finalize the Enquiry and present the Report. Against this background, we would like to call upon individual members of the public and organized interest groups to strictly adhere to the deadlines for submission of written submissions, and to attend the public hearing as per the Regional visits schedule that will be released soon before the start of the visits.

On behalf of the Commission, and in my capacity as Chairperson, I would like to restate what I have stated during the announcement ceremony of the appointment of the Commissioners. This was, that in course of executing its work, the Commission will listen to every Namibian, group and or community without fear, favour or prejudice.

Let me also make a commitment that members of the Commission do not represent any particular interest, and are not in any position to influence the work of the Commission. The terms of reference are very clear in stating that we inquire into, and report to the President. The quality of the Commission’s output is depended on the quality of the inputs that it will receives from the public.

 I would, therefore, extend our invitation to all Namibians, whether as individuals, group or community to freely participate in the work of the Commission, and contribute to resolving a national question affecting the development of our country.

**I THANK YOU.**