

# 'Fair government will rule for a long time'

By Irene IHoasés

**WINDHOEK** – "If you want to win the elections, be fair to the poor," is

the message from Bishop Zephania Kameeta, Chairperson of the Basic Income Grant (BIG) Coalition and President of the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN).

According to Kameeta, no political party manifesto speaks about how they will deal with the poverty situation in the country.

He said thousands of Namibians would go and stand in long lines to vote for political parties, most of them even on an empty stomach.

"How will you address poverty directly? Poverty is not addressed through investing investors to Namibia. Investors are not social workers, they are here to make money and they make sure that they employ few people on a minimum salary," the bishop noted in a special call for the implementation of the BIG on Wednesday evening.

The BIG is a proposed

monthly cash grant of N\$100 for each and every Namibian paid by the State, regardless of age or income.

The money paid to those people not in need, is recuperated through the tax system.

The main benefit of the grant is its ability to improve everyone's life by eradicating destitution and reducing poverty and inequality.

According to Kameeta, developed countries such as Switzerland are rich because they look after their citizens, where each citizen is provided with basic needs, such as shelter and food.

Kameeta said major ecumenical movements in the country view the poverty situation in the country as a scandal for humanity.

According to the UNDP's 2005 Human Development Report, 34.9 percent of Namibians live on US\$1 per day and 55.8 percent live on US\$2 per day.

About 30 percent of children of five years and below show signs of mal-

nutrition, while the unemployment rate stands at about 37 percent.

"Poverty is a scandal in Namibia, this beautiful country of the brave that we so much boast about, that we are rich. We are only two million, why should people be hungry," the clergyman asked at a meeting held in Katutura on Wednesday evening.

The BIG Coalition is on a high drive to solicit support for the proposed basic income grant.

The coalition held a meeting in Windhoek and plans to have another meeting in Oshakati, where people from the Otjivero settlement in the Omaheke Region who are beneficiaries of the BIG Pilot project will give testimonies on how the project affected their lives.

According to Kameeta, one uranium mine will be able to pay the BIG.

"We can dedicate one uranium mine to pay the BIG. Imagine how much money is derived from one uranium mine," he said.

According to figures

presented at the meeting, the BIG will only take 5.4 percent of the National Budget.

If the current year's budget is taken as an example, it will be N\$1.4 billion spent on the BIG from the N\$25 billion annual budget, the coalition said.

"I applaud the government for Vision 2030, but we will never reach it with 80 percent of the population living in poverty. Pay the people the BIG and they will be able to build houses for themselves," Kameeta stated.

Kameeta appreciates efforts by the Government, but said food distributions is not the answer, as one cannot buy shoes with food or pay the N\$4 clinic fee with sugar to be able to be treated.

He said only political will is needed to realise the BIG initiative.

"Bring the budget of Namibia to the Church and it will multiply," prophesised Kameeta, referring to the biblical miracle of Jesus feeding the hungry 5 000 from five loaves of bread and

two fish.

He said Namibia needs to learn to share if the country is to achieve its Vision 2030.

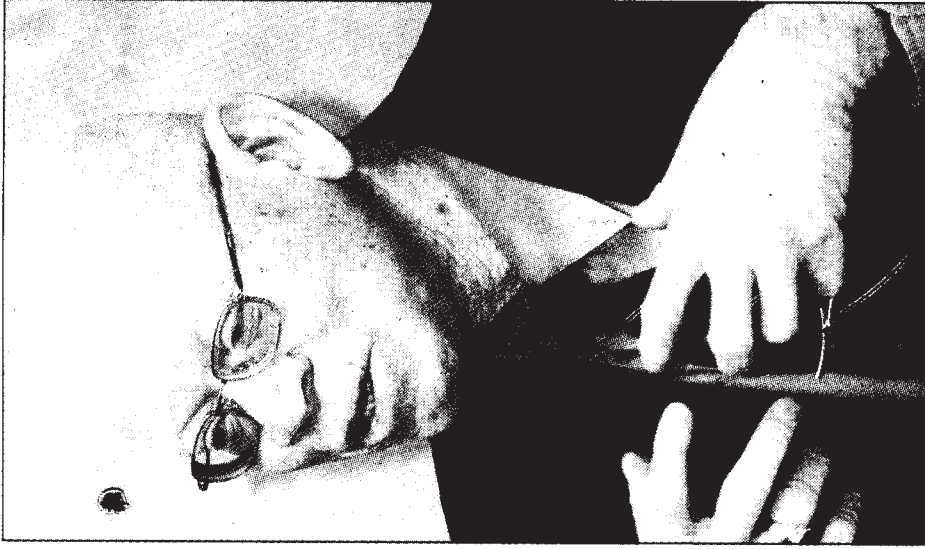
"People are paying themselves 30 millions and 120 millions daily in Namibia but paying N\$100 to the needy is not possible," Kameeta stated.

According to the bishop, Namibians are supposedly very concerned about corruption but yet to date, nobody has been prosecuted, stating that Namibia's problem is greed and selfishness.

"We need a change of heart, minds and attitudes and no child shall be hungry anymore. If you give, your gift will return in multiples," the bishop said.

Residents of the pilot project at Otjivero in the Omitara area have testified on numerous occasions about how the BIG has benefited their impoverished settlement, where they did not have food to eat or money with which to send their children to school.

Prime Minister, Nahas



Chairperson of the Basic Income Grant Coalition, Bishop Zephania Kameeta.

Angula recently said implementing a basic income grant would be making a joke out of the poor by saying that everybody should get N\$100, adding that it would discriminate against the poorest of the poor.

According to the Premier, such a grant was not a normal way of assisting people, arguing instead for a targeted approach to address poverty.

The BIG coalition consists of the Council of Churches in Namibia, the National Union of Namibian Workers, the National Forum of Non-Governmental Organisations, the Namibian Network of Aids Service Organisations, the Legal Assistance Centre, the National Youth Council, and the Labour Resource and Research Institute.

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