



Workers, youth pro-BIG - by Staff Reporter

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WINDHOEK – Government would face an uphill battle to maintain its perceived anti-Basic Income Grant (BIG) stance considering the tone being set by the youth and workers.

During a consultative meeting with visiting Brazilian Senator Professor Eduardo Suplicy and the representatives of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), which was joined by National Youth Council, workers were urged to demand BIG as their basic right.

The two bodies say while the grant is not the solution to end poverty, it is an essential step in the fight against destitution. National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) Secretary General Evilastus Kaaronda told scores of people gathered at the meeting that Government's position not to engage in a debate on the grant is not pro-poor and could keep people trapped in poverty. He said government could as well forget about development of the nation if so many people remain poor and the resources of the country continue to be the luxury of a privileged few.



Due to the country's high unemployment rate, huge income disparities and equally high HIV/AIDS prevalence, a grant is not only central to the country's development agenda, but is also a basic right, he said.

"We must not look at ourselves as beggars. We are saying it is a right. Even though a N\$100 per month looks insignificant, it would assist those living in dire situations," he added.

Secretary General of the National Youth Council (NYC), Mandela Kapere said denying the population a basic income grant was equivalent to telling the poor masses that only the rich have a right to ambitions in life. He scoffed at the idea that N\$100 every month would promote laziness. "It is an insult to our intelligence. Why would you stop working and going to school because of N\$100," Kapere questioned.

Instead of coming up with excuses, he said government "should come to the table on land redistribution, a livable minimum wage, a BIG and exorbitant land prices which have made the prices of houses out of reach for the majority of the country's citizens".

Kapere said the workers and the youth have the responsibility to inform themselves and multiply the information among their co-workers and peers on the need for a Basic Income Grant.

"Let us stand together as workers and the youth. If they (government) are not convinced, let us convince them and if they do not want to hear, let us make them hear that BIG is a must," he said.

NUNW withdrew from the BIG Coalition at its last Congress but decided to mandate its affiliate unions to get aboard the coalition and plan how they could work towards alleviation of poverty. NUNW President Elias Maanga said the workers were supportive of the grant because of the impact it would have on the lives of its members by addressing social evils such as unemployment, income disparities and HIV/AIDS.

Suplicy is on a crusade to advocate for a universal basic income for all citizens of the world as one of the most efficient means of eradicating absolute poverty. Namibia through the BIG Coalition implemented an N\$100 grant for all the residents of Otjivero, about 100 km east of Windhoek. It is a pioneer country in terms of cash transfers to fight poverty. Otjivero residents received N\$100 every month for two years.

With the end of the pilot phase of the project in January 2010, the amount was reduced to N\$80 per month.

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