



NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF NAMIBIA
(NYC)



"Youth growing with the Nation"

Basic Income Grant Coalition

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Press Release: NUNW Withdrawal from the BIG Coalition

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It is with deep regret that the BIG Coalition learned through the media that the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) decided to withdraw from the Basic Income Grant (BIG) Coalition. The NUNW has a long history of struggle against exploitation and for social justice and thus was a natural supporter and member of the BIG Coalition since its inception. As the idea of a BIG is widely supported amongst Namibian workers across the country, we were surprised by the NUNW's decision to leave the coalition.

The coalition wishes to encourage the NUNW to open up its structures and Congress for broader consultation on the question of a BIG in Namibia. It is our view that the working and unemployed masses stand to benefit most from a BIG. Economic trends suggest that wages are not rising at the same level as the cost of living, globally and certainly in Namibia. This pressure is most apparent amongst the working class in Namibia.

We encourage both the NUNW and its affiliate unions to continue to seek clarity on their own ideological stance in respect to social and economic justice and what options exist for Namibia.

We would have liked to engage the NUNW leadership before this decision was taken but we were not afforded the opportunity. What is at stake here is the fight against poverty in Namibia and we certainly regard the labour movement as an ally in this struggle. We always pointed out that the fight against poverty requires a variety of interventions of which the introduction of a BIG is just one. Structural changes to affect redistribution and to achieve full employment are aims that we fully agree with and the Coalition never presented the BIG as an alternative to structural changes.

After 20 years of independence we have an unemployment rate of over 50% and between 30% and 80% of Namibians are considered poor – depending on the definition used. In light of these harsh realities, we will continue campaigning for the introduction of a BIG as an effective first step to redress poverty. As a matter of fact, hundreds of thousands of poor Namibians would benefit and only about 6% of Namibia's national budget would be required to introduce a BIG countrywide! The results from the pilot project in Omitara are very encouraging and there is now even a global movement calling for the introduction of basic income grants. India, for example, is about to embark on pilot projects in 30 villages and Brazil is considering a national BIG. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has aggressively supported the idea of a BIG for years arguing that it would reduce the pressure on its members to cater for extended families on just one salary, a fact that holds true for Namibian workers as well.

We wish to point out that the Namibian Government has adopted social grants as one of its key strategies to fight poverty, such as the universal old age pension, disability and child support grants. However, the majority of Namibians are excluded and thus, a national BIG is supposed to fill this gap and to ensure a broader distribution of wealth throughout the country.

While, being deeply disappointed by the NUNW's withdrawal from the coalition, we will certainly continue promoting the BIG in Namibia.