

## FULL STORY

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# Pension scandal, BIG hot potatoes on NUNW agenda

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THE National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) leadership is embroiled in a serious fight over whether the Government Institutions Pension Fund (GIPF) scandal and the Basic Income Grant (BIG) should be part of the federation's congress agenda. The NUNW congress is scheduled for the weekend of September 3 and some unions, especially those who are represented on the GIPF board of trustees, are hell-bent on removing the 'sensitive' issue of

wastage of workers' retirement funds from the congress agenda.

Other issues to be discussed at the congress relate to whether it is appropriate for union leaders to sit on company boards, and the issue of union leaders who work in industrial relations or human resources department of companies.

The recent withdrawal of NUNW from the BIG Coalition is another divisive matter that has pitted top leaders in the federation against each other.

Recent media reports around the N\$650 million loss of GIPF funds invested in start-up Black Economic Empowerment companies have angered some trade unionists, who have called for an investigation into how union trustees on the fund could allow this to happen under their noses.

The most prominent and long-serving union members on the GIPF board of trustees are Peter Nevonga of the Namibia Public Workers Union (Napwu) and Risto Kapenda, whose term ended in October 2008.

Evilastus Kaaronda, secretary general of NUNW, has demanded that those who represented workers' interests on the GIPF board should account for the losses.

Kaaronda and Nevonga had already crossed swords during the aborted formation of Kuleni, which was formed by GIPF trustees to act as investment advisors to the fund. It appears that the two have not reconciled since then and with the renewed focus on the mismanagement of GIPF funds the chasm between the two has widened.

The clashes between Kaaronda and Nevonga, which in union circles are seen as principle differences, are now threatening the future of the outspoken NUNW secretary general in the trade union movement.

Nevonga was reported recently as having pressured the Napwu leadership into proposing another candidate for the NUNW top position. The name of the former general secretary of the Namibia Farm Workers Union, Alfred Angula, was thrown into the hat to challenge Kaaronda for the secretary general position.

Union sources say attempts to topple Kaaronda appear to be on the wane, but other sources in the know say Cabinet ministers have joined the anti-Kaaronda crusade. Nevonga has denied the allegations to The Namibian, saying he was an ethical person and would not conduct himself as alleged.

The Namibian understands that there is also another candidate, favoured by the group accused of self-enrichment in the unions, in the race. The said candidate is said to have compromised himself several times and is alleged to have misappropriated union funds. "They are afraid that he could come after them if he is re-elected," said a union insider, who added that the current animosity towards Kaaronda emanated from the fear that he might take action against those union leaders caught with their hands in the cookie jar.

Kaaronda was the visible face of NUNW on the BIG campaign, but since the federation's withdrawal, which he himself announced, there has been quiet diplomacy in union ranks to put the matter on the congress agenda. NUNW president David Namalenga was recently quoted in the media saying "down with BIG".

While those who have taken their cue from President Hifikepunye Pohamba and other Swapo top leaders would have the public believe that it was the workers' decision to withdraw from the poverty alleviation programme, The Namibian is informed that there are serious differences in the union rank-and-file over the matter.

Namalenga is said to be siding with the Nevonga camp that wishes to get rid of Kaaronda. Attempts to get rid of Kaaronda are linked to some of the reasons why unions are not complying with the NUNW's constitutional requirement to submit their lists of delegates and any proposed constitutional amendments to the NUNW a month before the congress. Unions are required to submit their delegates, the number of members and what each member pays to the union to determine if the said union is in good standing and can send the said number of delegates.

Union sources say some of the affiliate leaders, who are against Kaaronda, want to hand-pick congress delegates who will push their agenda and get rid of Kaaronda. So far The Namibian understands that only the Mineworkers' Union (MUN), Namibia Transport and Allied workers' Union (Natau) and the Namibia National Teachers' Union (Nantu), have submitted some form of a list. The rest are yet to do so – with only two weeks to go before the congress.

Despite refusing to talk to The Namibian, Kaaronda was yesterday quoted in the Namibian Sun admitting that his criticism of unionists on the GIPF board had "angered" his colleagues at Napwu, who "had invoked personal attacks" against him.

In the Namibian Sun report, Kaaronda said he was confident that he would keep his post as secretary general.