

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB, PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA, AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE OF
THE LATE MEESTER MARTIN LAZARUS SHIPANGA**

JULY 3, 2020

PARLIAMENT GARDENS

WINDHOEK

Check against delivery

- 1. Director of memorial service, Comrade Ben Amathila;**
- 2. The Bereaved Widow Madame Eveline Ndapewa Shipanga, children, grandchildren, extended family and students;**
- 3. Comrade Dr. Nangolo Mbumba, Vice President of the Republic of Namibia;**
- 4. Honourable Professor Peter Katjavivi, Speaker of the National Assembly;**
- 5. Your Lordship Petrus Damaseb, Acting Chief Justice;**
- 6. Madam Monica Geingos, First Lady of the Republic of Namibia;**
- 7. Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers;**
- 8. Honourable Members of Parliament;**
- 9. Comrade Sophia Shaningwa, Secretary General of the SWAPO Party;**
- 10. Comrade Marco Hausiku, Deputy Secretary General of the SWAPO Party;**
- 11. Honourable McHenry Venaani, leader of the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM);**
- 12. Your Excellency Anastas Kaboba Kasongo Wa-Kimba, Ambassador of the Republic of Congo and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps;**
- 13. All Service Chiefs present;**

- 14. Pastor Lorenst Raonga Kuzatjike;**
- 15. Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;**
- 16. Representatives from media houses;**
- 17. Fellow Mourners;**

A big tree has fallen. Our teacher, Meester Martin Lazarus Shipanga is no more. We are orphans, mourning one of the greatest unifiers of our land, one who allowed us to sit under the shade of his craft and teachings. It was under this inspiring shade that many of us discovered a sense of belonging, unity and nationhood.

For this great patriot claimed no particular tribe or region as his own. In our diversity, he saw parts of who he was as a Namibian. It therefore comes as no surprise that under his masterful guidance, Augustineum became the cradle and home to students from all corners of the country, thereby turning this institution that was intended to maintain the architecture of Apartheid latently, into a melting pot of nationalistic fervor, consciousness and an indispensable passage towards the liberation struggle.

That is the man of great caliber for whom we have gathered here.

Had it not been for the restrictions imposed on us by the COVID-19 pandemic, we would be gathered here in much larger numbers to celebrate a man who during his illustrious career as a teacher has been of great service to successive generations of Namibians.

I have decided to bestow the great honour of hero status on this outstanding Son of Namibia. There are those who may question this decision, saying that the late Meester Shipanga was not a political leader, nor did he partake in the armed struggle. However, one thing we should understand and emphasize is that the Heroes Acre, the ultimate location of burial for our national heroes, is meant for Namibians from all walks of life.

It is place for men and women, politicians, diplomats, soldiers, academics, athletes, scientists, artists, preachers, teachers and all who have done extraordinary things, in advancement of a greater national purpose.

The Heroes Acre is a place of collective memory and a celebration of all those who have left a lasting impression and a profound impact across the width and breadth of our land in different fields of human endeavor.

Today, we are not only mourning – but we are also celebrating the life of a hero in the late Meester Martin Lazarus Shipanga, a soft-spoken man with a serene demeanor, who educated, trained and socialized many of us to become better citizens and to be of service to our fellow human beings. Due to his lasting impact on our lives, we have become the people we are today.

Fellow mourners,

As an educator, Meester Martin Lazarus Shipanga, represented the intellectual vanguard of a pre-independent Namibia. At the time, he was the only black teacher at Augustineum and due to his lack of experience, he would prepare his lectures in the most meticulous manner, and thus became the best teacher.

It was through his expert tutelage and patient guidance that many of us here today, came to be at the forefront of the movement to liberate Namibians from the clutches of Apartheid tyranny.

My interactions with this outstanding human being and great teacher have left an eternal footprint on my life. I recall vividly, his lessons in Geography where he would say in Afrikaans, "As jy van Frankryk praat, dan dink jy van die Edik van Nantes, Franse Hugenote en Franse wyn." Who can forget that? Even today, when I think of France, I recall the teachings of Meester. His teachings permeated every aspect of our lives, beyond the classroom. For example, he instructed us in the area of etiquette and attire, ensuring that we had impeccable table manners and a decent dress code.

This should come as no surprise because those of us who know Meester Shipanga, recall the fact that he was disciplined, cultured, well-dressed, patient and exuded utmost civility at all times.

To highlight this fact, I want to share with you an anecdote about Meester, who taught us that in America, people do not talk when they are eating and that men would always vacate a seat for a woman if she did not have anywhere to sit. It was thus amusing when Meester Shipanga travelled to America where we welcomed him and ended up at a restaurant where the ambience was loud and boisterous.

We teased him respectfully about his lessons on Americans and silence at the eating table. During his visit, we also went to a subway station and there was an expectant lady who couldn't find a place to sit but nobody stood up for her. We wryly said, "Meester, this is America." We all laughed. When I returned to Namibia as Director of Elections, I did not get ample time to re-connect properly with Meester but he would often refer to me by saying (in Afrikaans), "Dis my seun."

Later on, as President, I had the opportunity of inviting some former students of Augustineum to State House in his honour. What a day it was, filled with fond memories and laughter.

Let me share, with this esteemed gathering, an excerpt from a letter that Meester wrote to me about that day:

Sy Edelagbare Godfried Hage Geingob, President van Namibia en me Geingos.

Wat het u hulle besiel en bejeën, om hierdie overgeetlike dag opsy te sit, om hierdie groep mense te onthaal en te trakteer en feestelike en gasvry te bejeën?

Nou verstaan ek baie goed, hoekom die oumense gehuil het, toe hulle hul pensioen gelde, ontvang het.

Laat die seën van ons Almagtige en ons Heilige God op u hul hoofde, en op hul werke, en op u hul paie, en op u hul huis wees, in lengte van dae.

As I reminisce about this great soul and what his legacy means to many of us, I am reminded of the words of the former President of South Africa, the late Comrade Nelson “Madiba” Mandela, who once said, “Education is the great engine of personal development.

It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation." Today, here we stand on the shoulders of one of our departed giants, sons and daughters of peasants, mineworkers and farmworkers.

Comrade Professor Peter Katjavivi – today Speaker of the National Assembly, Comrade Dr. Libertina Amathila - struggle icon, medical doctor and one of Namibia's foremost leaders, many others and of course Yours Truly, President of a great nation. Others among a galaxy of students of our late teacher include the late Dr. Mose Tjitendero, Hidipo Hamutenya and Theo-Ben Gurirab as well as Festus Muundjua, Ben Amathila and Katuutire Kaura. The list is long.

Through the exceptional contributions of Meester Shipanga, we can all attest, that indeed, education is the great engine of personal development and the greatest equaliser.

Indeed, we owe Meester Shipanga a great deal of gratitude for having instilled in us, the values of hard work, integrity and respect for other human beings. A humble man whose instruction and guidance, set us on a path towards great accomplishments for our country. We pay tribute to this man of unique intellect and constitution. He remains ingrained in our memory as an irreplaceable mentor, teacher, father and husband. We acknowledge his life achievements and his heroic deeds, which he carried out with the same discretion that defined his character. Although decades have passed since I sat in his class, his teachings have not faded from our collective memory.

For there is no tapering off of our recollections when it comes to the acts of great people. Every impact they have had on our lives, every moment they have shared with us, feels as if it was yesterday and will continue to reverberate in the deepest recesses of our memory. The steady and stellar contributions of Meester in the education of Namibians under difficult circumstances stand out on the altar of our nation's history.

If there are two enduring qualities about the late Meester, which I wish we could all emulate, it is unity and respect. This is a man who imparted not only a great deal of knowledge to his students, but he did so with a sense of respect and a shared national identity. Not tribal or regional identity.

At this critical time, when our nation is faced with the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic, I call on all citizens to come together in a unifying spirit and hold hands to defeat this virus. Let us empathize with our brothers and sisters in Walvis Bay and encourage them, and all Namibians nationwide, to follow and respect all the guidelines and regulations related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Together, we can overcome this great challenge.

Fellow mourners,

Meester Martin Lazarus Shipanga touched our hearts in distinctive ways that no words can ever accurately capture. How Meester touched our hearts and our lives gives us a sense of celebration.

After all, it gives us comfort that his legacy as an outstanding Namibian will continue to live through generations. It is only the heavens that are able to bring justice to the true value of this great man. Indeed, it is the heavens he has dearly departed to.

As we come to terms with the loss of this outstanding Son of Namibia, our most profound condolences go to you, the bereaved widow, children, and grandchildren for you are the ones who carry the greatest burden of this loss.

Please take solace in the fact that today, and in the difficult days ahead, the nation mourns with you. We pray that the Lord Almighty will welcome one of his best children with open arms.

Goodbye uncle and teacher. Go well.

May the soul of Meester Martin Lazarus Shipanga, rest in eternal peace.

I thank you.