

Remarks by Mr Hubert René Schillinger, Resident Representative of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Namibia at the Opening of the Training Workshop for Public Accounts Committees (Okahandja Lodge, 16.-17.03.2007)

Director of Ceremonies,
His Excellency, Hon. Deputy Minister of Finance, Mr Tjekero Tweya,
Honourable Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of the NA, Mr
Johan de Waal,
Honourable Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, of the NC, Mr S I
!Gobs,
Mr Moses Njarakana, Executive Director of the NDSC,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am speaking to you this morning as the representative of the co-sponsor of this important training workshop. Let me first reiterate that for us at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) the support to key institutions of representative democracy like parliaments always has been an important part of our work, on the national level. Like, for instance, here in Namibia, where we have been working with Parliament and individual committees of parliament for many years now. We work also on the regional level, where we have co-operation programmes with the SADC Parliamentary Forum as well as SADCOPAC, the SADC organisation of public accounts committees. We believe that support to parliamentary institutions and structures falls squarely within our mandate to promote democracy, development, peace and social justice through capacity-building, research and policy development as well as political dialogue.

For me personally, working with public accounts committees, both nationally and regionally, has always been a central plank of this. Public accounts committees do play a fundamental role in the system of checks and balances which is one of the fundamental cornerstones of democratic rule. If one talks about parliamentary oversight, one mainly talks public accounts committees. A public accounts committee which is competent, motivated and committed, is good for democracy and good governance, for transparency and accountability. And a weak public accounts committee is a sign that not everything is the way it should be.

There is a saying that the truth of government lies in the budget. Because the budget shows you, if a government puts his money where his mouth is. But if the truth of government lies in the budget, then the ultimate truth lies in the public accounts. It is the public accounts that show you, if indeed government has spent the money for the purposes it said it would use it. Or if the money that was intended to build clinics and pay for policemen and nurses ended up in the S&T-accounts of some officials or even worse. It is the public accounts which show you, if the government is delivering what it has promised to deliver. And it shows you, if it does so efficiently and effectively, if and where scarce resource urgently needed for development are wasted for other ends. Or as the British say: the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Hence the work of the whole accountability system of a country, including the auditor general's office, the Ministry of Finance, the treasuries of municipalities etc. and last but not least: parliamentary public accounts committees are of prime importance for the management of the public good and ultimately for development.

It is in that sense that this training which intends to impart further knowledge and further skills to legislators specialising in public accounts is a useful and most welcome initiative taken by the Namibia Democratic Support Centre. In our view it is an initiative, which further empowers parliament and its members. It is an initiative which strengthens checks and balances and which is good for development, an initiative which we applaud and wholeheartedly support.

I therefore wanted to conclude my short message by thanking once again Moses Ndjarakana and his team for having organised this workshop, but also by reiterating our preparedness to continue and deepen our cooperation with the NDSC, with the public accounts committees of both houses of parliament, but also with parliament as a whole.

I THANK YOU!