

Dear Chairman,

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Minority Forum. I wish to briefly highlight the position of the Rehoboth Baster Community in Namibia.

Namibia is still a young country with a diverse population consisting of many Peoples who have a long history. In order to accommodate this diversity, Namibia enacted many international law standards and practices and today is one of the most minority and human rights friendly countries in Africa and the world. For example, the traditional Authorities Act of 2000 provides all the Peoples of Namibia a form of a local and regional administration over their traditional lands, within the framework of Namibia.

However, the Rehoboth Baster were the only People that were excluded from this Act, despite the fact that the Supreme Court of Namibia in 1993 ruled that the traditional leadership of the community had survived Namibian independence.

This means that activities of the traditional leadership in favour of the community are not recognised or are even penalised by the Namibian government, as we witness this year again with the court case against Kaptein John McNab for distributing land to the community based on the traditional laws of the Rehoboth Basters.

At the moment the Rehoboth Basters are therefore the only traditional community who do not have control over their lands, which leads to increasing poverty and alienation.

In order to combat injustice the Rehoboth Basters did not resort to military means but used the most honorable thing open to them and that is: they rallied support among the community and went to court. These court cases had their victories and losses. The Rehoboth Basters were recognised by the courts of Namibia as a traditional community but in the end were not given title to their lands. Furthermore, land ownership and distribution that would favor the Rehoboth Baster community and that was confirmed by government through Rukoro report is constantly being delayed.

These actions by the Namibian government show a lack of respect for the Rehoboth Baster community which nonetheless still considers itself to be valuable and indispensable part of Namibian Rainbow nation. The community has been in non-violent dialogue with the government of Namibia since its independence in 1990. However, a proper dialogue can only exist if both parties recognise each other's human dignity. Countries need to accommodate diversity when they include some groups but at the same time exclude others. If on the other hand it includes everyone then diversity becomes a strength for any country and conflict and violence can be mostly prevented.

In conclusion: Namibia has one of the best legal systems for the protection of minority rights in the world, but this must also be accompanied by the best intentions for it to be an example to the global community. The Rehoboth Baster community therefore calls on the Namibian government to find strength in diversity and include the Rehoboth Basters as full partners in the Rainbow nation and recognise them as traditional authorities who can administer their land.

Thank you,
Jeroen Zandberg