

**OPENING SPEECH BY HONOURABLE PENDA YA NDAKOLO, MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF EX BLUE KUNENE AT OSHAKATI INDEPENDENCE STADIUM ON 24 AUGUST 2017**

The Director of Ceremonies

Honourable Clemens Kashuupulwa, Regional Governor of Oshana Region

Honourable Angelika Muharukua, Regional Governor of Kunene Region

Lieutenant General John Mutwa, Chief of the Defence Force

Air Vice Marshal Martin K Pinehas, Air Force Commander

Major General Nestor Shalaunda, Army Commander

Rear Admiral Peter H. Vilho, Navy Commander

General Officers and officers of the Ministry of Defence and the Namibian Defence Force

General Officers of the Namibian police

Key Stakeholders representing various Ministries and organisations

Dear Exercise participants from SADC Member states

Distinguished Invited Guests

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

## **Good Morning**

It is great pleasure and honour for me to be here today at the Opening Ceremony of Exercise Blue Kunene.

On behalf of the Ministry of Defence, the Namibian Defence Force and on my own behalf, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the members of the Defence Forces of SADC Member States with Contingents and observers participating in Exercise Blue Kunene, which is starting today and will continue until the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2017.

Exercises of this magnitude require long hours of meticulous planning and preparations. I therefore want to commend the SADC Planning Elements, the Defence Forces of participating Member States and Stakeholders for dedicating time and resources since the Planning Conferences for the execution of this Exercise.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Seeing that there might be some ambiguities regarding the relevance of Exercise Blue Kunene, it is important to clarify that, together with other instruments, Exercise Blue Kunene is a product of the African Union strategy on the Role of the African Standby Force in Humanitarian and Natural Disaster Support. The role of the African Standby Force in support of Humanitarian action and natural disasters relief is expected to contribute to the overall efforts to prevent and effectively respond to complex emergencies on the continent. This is done in accordance with Article 13 (f) of the AU Peace and Security Council Protocol, which highlights one of the functional aspects of the African Standby Force as being the facilitation of “humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population in conflict areas and support efforts to address major natural disaster.”

**RESTRICTED**

It should therefore be clearly understood that Exercise Blue Kunene has no hostile intentions or hidden agendas. It is a SADC Air Forces Exercise aimed at building regional capability that will eventually strengthen the African Standby Force.

To this effect, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Air Force, the Air Arms and Air wings from within the SADC Region have assembled here today as a single unit to exercise and prepare for such eventualities.

Essentially, the Exercise seeks to enhance the already high level of interconnectedness and interoperability in preparation for rapid deployment capability which has been developed through other exercises such as Exercise Blue Clutter hosted by Republic of South Africa in 2011, Exercise Blue Zambezi hosted by the Republic of Angola in 2013 and the most recently Exercise Blue Okavango hosted by Republic of Botswana in 2015. It is important to note that the Namibian Air Force has successfully participated in all the previous exercises.

By the end of the Exercise, we foresee operational lessons being deducted for future exercises and most importantly to further develop the SADC Strategic Airlift Concept.

Therefore, over the next 10 days or so, Exercise Blue Kunene is expected to distribute over 400 tons of food aid in the Kunene Region in the Constituencies of Opuwo Rural, Epupa and Sesfontein. This will be done in conjunction with the Office of Prime Minister Disaster & Risk Management Unit. Additionally, medical outreach programmes will be conducted in the form of screening and treatment of various ailments that will be administered to the population of the Kunene Region.

## **Master of Ceremonies**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

With over One Thousand And Two Hundred (1200) military personnel operating various aircraft platforms, the general communities in the affected areas of Ondangwa, Ruacana, Opuwo and Okangwati are reminded to remain calm and accord the participants warm hospitality and cooperation.

For this, we count on the leadership and support of the regional authorities spearheaded by our Regional Governors who are present here.

To the exercise participants, Exercise Blue Kunene provides yet another opportunity to put your skills to test and develop new ones. I have no doubt that the preparatory work that you all have put in for this Exercise will manifest itself in the seamless execution of the Exercise. I am confident that where challenges are encountered you will cooperate and plan diligently to overcome them. I therefore wish great success to the participants of Exercise Blue Kunene.

**GOOD LUCK AND HAVE FUN AS YOU EXERCISE AND LEARN MORE!**

Director of Ceremonies

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is now my distinct honour to declare the SADC Exercise Blue Kunene officially opened.

**I THANK YOU**