



Finland-Namibia  
150 years of friendship  
#FinNam150

## **102nd Independence Day of Finland and 150 Years of Finnish-Namibian Friendship**

**Welcoming remarks by  
Ambassador Pirkko-Liisa Kyöstilä  
Embassy of Finland**

**11 December 2019**

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

Permit me to follow the protocol already established by the Master of Ceremonies, our dear friend Mr. Paulus Nakawa. Thank you Paulus also for introducing the program of our festive occasion.

It is a great honor for me to address an audience as high level as we are having with us tonight. I have the privilege to welcome you to the 102nd anniversary of Finland's Independence and to the celebration of 150 years of Finnish-Namibian friendship.

On behalf of the entire Finnish Embassy: a very warm welcome to you all. Our whole Embassy is present here tonight. We are delighted to have you all with us. Together with you, we want to make this evening a memorable event.

Usually, we celebrate the Finnish Independence Day in Windhoek on the 6th of December. Today we have gathered in Northern Namibia, in Ondangwa, for good reasons. As has been said, we are here to celebrate Finland's Independence and the joint history that our two countries share. Namibia is the only country in Africa with whom Finland has a relationship that dates back to the year 1869.

Next July, 150 years have passed since the first Finnish missionaries arrived here what is now northern Namibia. The exact place is not far away from here, in Omandongo,

where the work of the missionaries started. We Finns set a high value on the unique history we have with Namibia and on the numerous friendships, which we have built with Namibians during the decades. Our countries and peoples are truly close to each other.

The 150 years which Finns and Namibians have been cooperating is a long time. It contains different phases, experiences and activities, all of them being mainly of a positive and encouraging nature. I am not going to cover our intriguing journey more as other distinguished guests will elaborate it further.

My second very pleasant duty is to launch the book “Intertwined Histories – 150 years of Finnish-Namibian Relations”. The book is published by the University of Turku and edited by Dr. Marjo Kaartinen, Dr. Leila Koivunen and Dr. Napandulwe Shiweda. Tonight, we are joined with several authors who have written essays for this book. Thank you for your contribution.

In this hall, you can visit a small exhibition exploring the stories the book is telling about. It is indeed fascinating how the relations of our peoples, one from the very far North, the other from the far South, formed into a remarkable and unique bond. Finnish missionaries truly made an impact in this area. They also had an effect on the local culture, for example, on the traditional Aawambo dress as well as on the first names of many people. I am happy to note that, tonight, we have many guests with Finnish first names with us, for example, Alpo, Aina, Aino, Anneli, Armas, Eino, Hannu, Hilma, Hilya, Paavo, Saima, Selma, Sirkka and Vilho.

In order to study the whole story, we have reserved for each and every one of you a copy of this book. Kindly get yours from the table in this room.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 2019 is approaching its end. December is a good moment to reflect the calendar year, our joint agenda and work accomplished. Let me give you a short overview.

The elections, both in Finland and Namibia have marked this year. Our parliamentary election took place in April and the new Finnish Government with 19 ministers was appointed in June. Just a few days ago, the Government had to resign.

H.E. Vice-President Nangolo Mbumba visited Finland on the invitation of the Finnish Prime Minister. The meetings and discussions, which were held in Helsinki and Turku, form a solid basis for our continued cooperation and next high-level visits.

In the beginning of this year, 49 Namibian teacher students graduated in Rauma and Joensuu with a Bachelor or Master degree. The teachers returned to Namibia and many of them are now working in different parts of the country. In this connection, I want to underline the vital role of the Namibian Embassy in Helsinki and Ambassador Haufiku’s commitment to make this demanding educational plan come true. The cooperation with the Embassy of Namibia in Helsinki has been productive throughout the year 2019. Visiting your office, Your Excellency Ambassador Haufiku, is always like a ray of Namibian sunshine in the midst of Nordic breezes.

In general, education has been a golden and consistent thread during our 150 years relationship. It started here in the missionary schools: children learned how to read and write. By now, education has moved to new levels – the teacher students and the satellite campus of the University of Turku at UNAM being only two concrete examples of a new kind of education sector engagement.

In May, we witnessed an inauguration of a desalination plant at the UNAM Sam Nujoma campus in Henties Bay. In fact, it is a carbon garden including the plant, which runs by solar power. The project is implemented based on a public-private partnership.

May continued with a festivity: H.E. Founding President, Dr. Sam Nujoma had his 90th birthday party not far away from here, at Etunda Homestead in Omusati. What a special and joyful day it was!

In late May, we attended the memorial services of H.E. Dr. Nickey Iyambo. He was a very close friend of Finland, a person whose achievements and influence are beyond one's comprehension. The Finnish-Namibian history and friendship would look very different without Dr. Nickey's personal contribution. Thank you very much Mr. Pandeni Hage Iyambo for your participation in today's celebration.

When looking at the year 2019, I know that we would be nowhere without the outstanding work and tremendous stamina – sisu as we call it in Finnish – of my colleagues at the Finnish Embassy. Thank you – kiitos – you are the very best!

Dear Friends,

As for the year 2020, we look forward to continuing our rich cooperation and diverse engagement with Namibia both on the bilateral and multilateral level. We will move on with the 150 years celebration: we are hopeful that there will be a number of events commemorating this milestone next year.

Naturally, one of the biggest occasions that all of us are looking forward to is Namibia's 30th anniversary in March. The independence of Namibia was a great victory for your people. It was also very meaningful for our relations, one of the highlights of our joint history.

Lastly, I would like to propose a toast to the health and happiness of H.E. President Hage Geingob and of the Namibian people.

I thank you!