

ROLE OF OFFICE ON INSTITUTIONS SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY IN STRENGTHENING PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

By Advocate N Cetywayo: Induction for New CGE Commissioners: 26

February 2014

I have been asked to speak on the role of the Office on Institutions Supporting Democracy (OISD) in strengthening public accountability.

Before I do so, with your permission Mr Chairperson, I would like you to note apologies from both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. Conflicts of priorities have made it impossible for them to be with us here today. As you may be aware the Minister of Finance is delivering Budget Speech today in the National Assembly. As the hosts the two are required to be there. They have however requested me to re-assure you of their support to you and the cause of the Commission. The National Assembly has a high regard for, and is supportive of the Institutions Supporting Democracy; and takes pride in knowing that they are part of this family.

OISD is a creature of the Resolution of the National Assembly on the recommendation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Chapter and the Related Institutions. It is a product of an identified political need by the National Assembly, in its pursuit for sustained, enhanced constitutional democracy. It was born out of a desire on the part of the National Assembly for an enhanced relationship with ISDs and also as one of the mechanism anticipated in section 55 of the Constitution. The operating mandate of this office can be summarized as follows: “Assisting the National Assembly perform its legislative and oversight responsibility over the Institutions Supporting Democracy (ISDs) and the Executive, while ensuring firm support to what ISDs stand for constitutionally.

Core to our constitutional democracy (that you are required to support) is the human rights culture (people first); more importantly the inherent right to dignity. Parliament must legislate to ensure that our constitutional democracy lives, therefore the enjoyment of this right and others in every respect. The Executive must develop policy and deliver services addressing these human rights in accordance with this legislation. The human right to dignity is protected if a person has a decent job by employment either self or employed and or whatever manner leveling playing fields to the right of access to economic activities. Currently government seeks to ensure realization of these rights by identifying priorities to deliver on:

- Education
- Health
- Rural Development
- Access to work
- Crime

CGE's complimentary oversight mandate in the context of this democracy is focused on gender equality. CGE compliments the National Assembly to fulfill its oversight constitutional obligation on the Executive and other state implementation agencies. Therefore in your planning (strategic and annual performance plans) to execute this mandate you also are expected to focus on these priorities.

Your Strategic Plans and Annual Performance Plans necessarily need to answer the question as to how you are going to assist the National Assembly oversee that these priorities are indeed delivered on in so far as they relate to gender issues.

As a practical link between you and National Assembly OISD analyses your plans, when you table them, and advise the Speaker and the Portfolio Committee that oversees you on whether they reflect these priorities. Because you are expected to cost your strategic plans, when you report on your performance, OISD will analyse whether you have performed according to your strategic plans and budget allocated to you and advise the Speaker and the Portfolio Committee. Our analysis will also include answering questions of whether the budget allocated, therefore resources at your disposal, are necessarily sufficient for you to perform optimally. By doing this OISD will be assisting the National Assembly to support you as is required by section 181(3) of the Constitution.

This is done mindful of the fact that the country's revenue collection as reflected by Minister of Finance is far from sufficient to meet the expenditure needs of the country. Prioritisation and re-prioritisation becomes a necessity exercise. Our role also includes assisting in ensuring that work that you submit does not fall in between the cracks due to the complexity of work done by all committees benefiting or affected your work.

OISD take very keen interest in facilitating proper capacitation of ISDs in terms of Human Capital. We have just done that successfully, driven by the constitutional dictate that you must at all times have no less than eight Commissioners to take valid decisions during your decision making processes. You have four new Commissioners and will be joined by four more sometime in June. We take keen interest in the well-being of this institution.

OISD therefore functions as a good conduit between Parliament and ISDs for a more involved and quality relationship. In summary OISD assists the NA & Portfolio Committees by:

- Coordinating accountability functions of the National Assembly
- Highlighting accountability issues emanating from the tabled reports for possible debate in the House
- Communicating well in good time resolutions of the House pertaining to all ISDs to the relevant state organs for implementation
- Accordingly monitoring and tracking progress
- Promoting, restoring and ensure maintenance of good governance within ISDs

The process of accountability requires all organs of state to report to the National Assembly on the implementation of their mandate and expenditure of public funds. This is done mainly through Annual Reports, other reports and engagement with Portfolio Committees.

At the end of it all the question this is intended to answer is: What impact all of us make on the lives of ordinary citizen? It is an answer to this question that OISD is interested in, to assist the Members of Parliament also account to the electorate.