

Namibia: Put Names, Faces to Heroines

Staff Reporter

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Okahandja — Namibia cannot afford to ignore or forget her heroines, as history will judge her harshly if she fails to recognise, document and put faces and names to many of her unsung fallen national heroines, says Dr Itah Kandjii-Murangi.

Kandjii-Murangi recently spoke at the 87th commemoration of the Red Flag Day here on the role of women in nation-building.

Saluting the occasion of the honour of many unrecognised women who sacrificed in so many ways towards the liberation of the country, she said: "We know that your efforts were for a good and just cause. We thank you and your male counterparts for serving as the bridge that has connected us to independence."

She said the onus was on historians, scholars and the Namibian women themselves to correct the mistake of the non-recognition of their part in the struggle. This they could do through scientific research and surveys in all the 13 regions of the country to document the works of many great Namibian women who made a difference and special contributions towards the country's nationhood.

"We cannot sit idle and watch the fast erosion of the gains of political goodwill and other positive factors, which in the past few years facilitated the increase of women representation in the Namibian Parliament," she said, adding that it was important to understand that society's welfare had no chance of improving unless the condition of women was improved. This again was only possible with the direct participation and involvement of women in decision-making in the national structures.

Kandjii-Murangi said women were not mere spectators in the great resistance to foreign domination and the liberation struggle, but participated actively as advisors, and provided food, nursed the injured and even fought to protect themselves and their children.

"The great heroes of our land had their real female lieutenants, their wives, who possibly knew their husbands' vulnerabilities and sensitivities, real people who had to endure great pains and suffering with and on behalf of their husbands but their names and indeed the extent of their contributions are known only to their immediate descendants," said Kandjii-Murangi.

Even with the second wave of resistance which was intensified by the likes of Hosea Kutako, Sam Nujoma, Mburumba Kerina, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, Jariretundu Kozonguizi, Hendrik Witbooi, Kenahunio Tjautumaha Tjetjoo, Kaamukoro Kandjii and Kamue Tjozongoro, women equally participated and assisted in devising strategies, planning, availing venues for accommodation, clandestine meetings, sheltering fighters and refugees, dressing of wounds, provision of food and water and writing letters and doing translations.

"I am informed that the 2nd headquarters of the Ovaherero Chief's Council in Windhoek was Mama Else's place. She provided not only the venue for important meetings that facilitated the writing of the petition to the UN, but also played an instrumental role in protecting and concealing the whereabouts of the wanted negotiators or plotters," said Kandjii-Murangi. Still, nothing is heard or has been written about their contributions and that of other women who worked tirelessly to facilitate and smoothen the negotiation and planning process.

Kandjii-Murangi said today women's participation in self-employment projects, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and corporate leadership is commendable. But more still needs to be done.

"Women have distinguished themselves as the torchbearers of the fight for equality and equity. To avoid erosion of the gains of inroads, it is high time that women's roles are appreciated both in the public and private sectors by integrating them in the upper echelons of leadership structures," she said.

The rise of women in strategic national and international leadership positions, she said, has ushered in new hope for humanity.

Increased women representation at legislative level has led to women issues being articulated and women in leadership take decisions addressing the needs and interests of humanity, she added.

"The challenge is to increase the quality and quantity of women representation at all levels of society - the corporate world, churches, traditional leadership and politics, among others."

Kandjii-Murangi noted that the declining number of women representation in the Namibian Parliament did not augur well for the achievement of gender equality.

In this regard she urged support for the implementation of the "national, SADC, AU and other international protocols and treaties to which we are signatory, which call for gender balance in all spheres of our nation-building as a democratic state".