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Namibia : Transparency Is All It Takes

editorial

On 29 June 2015, The Namibian carried a story under the heading "Geingob's unexplained cash".

The story was a result of questions sent to President Hage Geingob shortly after he publicly declared his assets.

It took the President more than a month to answer the set of questions we had asked him. When we submitted follow-up queries, among them the need for clarity on the work he did for HG Consultancy, he failed to answer them, but instead chose to release our first set of questions as well as his answers through social media.

The Namibian wanted further clarity on the reason why almost half of Geingob's N\$51 million asset base was in cash and similar liquid form. Less than 10 years prior, Geingob was reported as having defaulted on the payment of basic bills such as those for municipal services of more than N\$300 000, and this was the basis for us asking for more clarity.

In his answers, Geingob confirmed that he had earned the equivalent of N\$3 million from consultancy work in the Uramin-Areva deal, but added that he had given away N\$2 million to two unnamed South Africans, who had allegedly introduced him to the controversial transaction.

Our questions were influenced by the fact that already then, **we had come across information that French state-owned nuclear power producer, Areva, not only paid too much, but that bribery and kickbacks of several sorts were involved in the deal, and that investigations were ongoing.**

Toronto Stock Exchange-based Uramin had owned, among its assets across a few African countries, the Trekkopje mine in the Namib Desert, which they touted as the jewel in their crown, promising it had rich and huge deposits of uranium. They sold it to Areva for US\$2,5 billion. Already at that time, Geingob's consultancy was among those that had come under scrutiny, and therefore we approached him to provide clarity.

Until today, he has not explained why he would hand over more than two-thirds of his fee earned from supposedly diligent consultancy work to people who merely alerted him about the project.

Some of the questions we posed, but which he failed to answer, included :

- Is it not questionable that a process and companies which benefited directly and indirectly from your private consultancy would get further benefits from the government, and specifically from the ministry that you headed ?
- Did you not feel conflicted in the process of allowing tax exemptions to Areva ?
- Did you disclose such apparent conflict to anyone ? To whom and when ? Are there documents to that effect ?
- Would you care to share with us too the minutes detailing the process leading to Areva's tax exemptions ?
- Do you still insist it was the correct decision giving tax exemptions to Areva, while it had done so little work, compared to other mining companies who have been and remain active, such as Rssing and Langer Heinrich ?
- Should the Areva exemptions not be revoked by now ?
- Considering the controversy that Uramin and Areva got itself into, do you regret facilitating that deal, and what would you have done differently if you had the chance to ?

Now, reports have emerged that French investigators are probing the Uramin-Areva deal, including the role played by HG Consultancy. According to reports, the investigators are pursuing allegedly illicit monthly transfers of US\$10 000 to Geingob made between 2008 and 2009, added the sources.

Former Areva chief Anne Lauvergeon is also implicated for having submitted inaccurate accounts intended to hide the collapse in the value of Uramin, while former director of the group's mining operations, Sebastien de Montessus, is also being pursued for alleged corruption.

The President's lawyer, Sisa Namandje, strongly denied the corruption accusations, saying the investigations "do not implicate Dr Geingob or the government of the Republic of Namibia". Namandje maintained "there is no link between the additional costs of the transaction between Areva and Uramin, and the services delivered by HG Consultants".

And on Wednesday, President Geingob emphasised this by stating that he was not paid by Areva.

We are not rushing to judgement on his guilt or not, but believe that more transparency at an earlier stage would have prevented what is happening now.

Having declared an all-out war against corruption and stating, as he did on Wednesday, that corruption is enemy number one, Geingob should be aware that his reputation is at stake at all times.

Already, his links to questionable people like Ernest Adjovi of Kora awards' fame, and even his indecisiveness on the SME Bank where we expected an inquiry, are affecting how people perceive his 'war' on corruption.

Even former President Hifikepunye Pohamba was decisive in firing Paulus Kapia after the Avid scandal broke and he was linked to it.

Can the same be said about Geingob and all the ministers and deputies linked to corruption ?



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