



Following is the speech from Director Toni Hancox, at the signing ceremony with the Embassy of Finland on 30 October 2013:

Ms Anne Saloranta, Charge d' Affairs at the Embassy of Finland

Ms Marika Matengu, Programme Co-ordinator at the Embassy of Finland

Staff of the Embassy and from the National Planning Commission

Colleagues from the Legal Assistance Centre

Members of the media

I would very shortly like to highlight the cooperation between the Embassy of Finland and the Legal Assistance Centre and what this cooperation seeks to achieve.

The Legal Assistance Centre is the only public interest law firm serving the entire Namibian nation over its vast regions. Although we are a law firm we do not just do litigation but promote human rights in a holistic manner, therefore additionally using research, advocacy, education, training, legal advice and support. Since we assist those who are indigent and cannot afford to pay for our services, we would not last very long if it was not for the generous support received from various donors, a major one being the Fund for Local Cooperation of the Embassy of Finland.

The Legal Assistance Centre believes that we should all strive towards a human rights based democracy with a strong focus on socio-economic rights. Many Namibian people live in poverty and this affects each and every aspect of their lives. We believe that each and every child in Namibia, regardless of their economic realities, should be granted the full array of human rights as was envisaged by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights many years ago after the atrocities of the Second World War. The funding we are here to receive today will enhance these ideals and will specifically focus on health rights, land rights and gender equality, each forming a very necessary component in granting full access to human rights.

The Embassy of Finland has pledged support for a period of two years for three units of the Legal Assistance Centre, namely the Aids Law Unit, the Gender, Research and Advocacy Project and the Land, Environment and Development Unit. In a nutshell, the activities to be supported include:

Aid Law Unit: education and training for persons living with HIV/AIDS, Key Populations and health care workers. This intervention will focus on HIV/AIDS and human rights and be supported by research on the right to health with emphasis on access to treatment as well as legal advice and assistance when needed.

Gender, Research and Advocacy Project: This project will emphasize three key areas namely Child Protection, Gender Equality in the family and Gender-based violence. Emphasis will be on raising public awareness about the Child Care and Protection Act supported by the production of a guide on the Act for service providers, advocacy and a road show on family laws particularly child maintenance, as well as on a number of gender-based violence issues.

Land, Environment and Development Unit: This Unit will focus on addressing illegal cattle grazing and fencing, prepare research on the impact of the Flexible Land Tenure Act on poor households and lobby for security of tenure on resettlement farms, while also providing training of Communal Land Boards. Community empowerment will be addressed through advocacy on the recommendations of the San Study and envisaged support of their ancestral land rights.

I therefore would like to sincerely thank the Embassy of Finland for their support since the inception of the Legal Assistance Centre. They have walked with us through the years and the impact that their funding has had for the people of Namibia cannot be measured. It is only with such support that we have been able to continue with our work.

We undertake to use the support pledged wisely and in a manner that will ensure that we can continue providing the services still so desperately needed. We are confident that this support represents a further brick in the building of a human rights based democracy in Namibia.

Lastly, the Legal Assistance Centre would like to thank the Embassy of Finland for its continued faith in our activities and our organization. We sincerely thank you for this vote of confidence.

I thank you.

Toni Hancox, Director

Legal Assistance Centre

30 October 2013