

Press Release: "Namibia: Government Energy Officials in No Show"



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By Chamwe Kaira

Top officials from the Ministry of Mines and Energy and NamPower pulled out from an energy conference held in Windhoek at the last minute yesterday.

No reasons were given for their last minute withdrawal.

Reiner Jagau of NamPower and John Titus of the ministry of mines were scheduled to speak at the conference but pulled out of the meeting.

Messages were left at the offices of Titus and Jagau to clarify why they pulled out but they did not respond yesterday.

The Electricity Control Board, whose CEO Foibe Namene, had been invited to speak at the conference, said he was out of the country and that other senior officials of the ECB were out of town. The ECB said organisers of the conference were told not to include her on the programme because she was travelling abroad.

Of the government officials invited to speak at the event, only finance minister Calle Schlettwein and Saurabh Suneja, director of the PPP unit in the finance ministry attended the event.

The conference under the theme 'Energy in Namibia - A constructive review and way forward,' was organised by the Economic Association of Namibia, Hanns Seidel Foundation and The Namibian newspaper.

"Just to clarify, Nampower, the Electricity Control Board and the ministry of mines and energy were invited, unfortunately they could not attend," said Suta Kavari of the Economic Association of Namibia.

Rowland Brown of the Economic Association of Namibia noted that Namibia and the rest of southern Africa had not invested in major power projects recently and that most hydro projects were established in the 1970s and 80s.

The current drought in the region has led to water levels in rivers and dams dropping, leading to deficits in countries like Zambia and Zimbabwe from where Namibia imports part of its electricity.

Brown said 80 000 electricity customers have been added to the national supply grid over the past seven years bringing the number of electricity consumers in Namibia to 250 000.

Brown said with power purchase agreements with neighbouring countries expiring soon, these may have to be renegotiated at higher prices due to the power deficit in the region.

"The question is, at what cost will the power purchase agreements be renegotiated," Brown said adding that Namibia needs cheap and abundant energy if the country is to attain Vision 2030 objectives.

"Many options have been proposed, both short and long-term, but few can be implemented cheaply and quickly," Brown said.

He said the average household expenditure on power in 2014/2015 was N\$600.

He said power shortages can lead to significant decreases in mining output, economic growth and job creation.