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STANDARDS INTEGRATION IN AFRICA

The Namibian Standards Institution (NSI) as a member of the African Organization for Standardization (ARSO) is this year hosting the 18th ARSO General Assembly and 44th ARSO Council Meeting from 21-25 November 2011, at Hotel Safari and Conference Centre in Windhoek, Namibia.

The African Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO) is Africa's regional standards body formed by the AU (previously OAU) and UNECA in 1977 in Accra Ghana. The fundamental mandate of ARSO is to develop tools for standards development, standards harmonization and implementation of these systems to enhance Africa's internal trading capacity, increase Africa's product and service competitiveness globally, and uplift the welfare of African consumers as well as standardization forums for future prospects in international trade referencing.

The theme for the 18th General Assembly of ARSO is: *"African integration through Knowledge Tooling and Standards as the Pillars for a Green Economy"*. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), a Green Economy results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental and ecological scarcities. In its simplest expression, green economy is low carbon; resource efficient and socially inclusive.

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The General Assembly, is opened by Mr Eddy T Kamboua, Under Secretary: Trade and Commerce, on behalf of Honourable Dr. Hage Geingob, Minister of Trade and Industry, who noted that Namibia joined other standardizers from around the continent of Africa to deliberate on the state of standardisation in Africa and to map the way forward. He continued to say that Namibia is represented at the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) by the Namibian Standards Institution (NSI) as a member body, and similarly, “the NSI is part of the 149 IEC, International Electrotechnical Commission, family through its active participation in the 80 members of the IEC Affiliate Country Programme.”

The Government’s statement emphasized that international standards facilitate world trade by effectively removing technical barriers to trade, leading to new market opportunities and economic growth. *“Simply put: a component or system manufactured to an international standard in country A can be sold and used in countries B through to Z if these countries have adopted the same international standard.”*

International standards provide industry and users with the framework for achieving economies of design, greater product and service quality, increased interoperability of products, and improved production and delivery systems. At the same time, international standards also encourage an improved quality of life by contributing to safety, human health and the protection of the environment.

Namibia is a strong proponent of African economic integration as articulated in the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) adopted in April 1980 followed by the Abuja Treaty of 1991 which re-affirmed the commitment of the continent’s Heads of State and Government to an integrated African economy and, ultimately, the launch by the African Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) at Sirte in 2001 to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

End.

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