

Namibia Sets Up Its First Atomic Board - by Petronella Sibeene

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WINDHOEK – Namibia yesterday commissioned its first Atomic Energy Board. The board will formulate a national policy on nuclear energy amidst anticipation that uranium exploration and mining will increase in the next few years.

Minister of Health and Social Services Dr Richard Kamwi, yesterday announced the six members of the board. They are Dr Wotan Swiegers (chairperson), Martin Andjaba, Dr Chocky Shitaleni Herman, Helen Itamba, lileni Shikwambi and Theo Nghitila.

The minister says the board will create awareness among Namibians on the extent of nuclear or radiation related applications, and the risk of nuclear applications and its impact on health.

It will further recommend approaches on the protection of people and the environment from the harmful effects of radiation, the minister said.

“We would expect to be informed and guided on how we can utilise nuclear technology in various fields. There must be a perfect balance so that the benefit of nuclear technology is fully exploited, whilst ensuring that it is under a controlled and monitored framework,” the minister said.

He reiterated that the body will also ensure that the use of nuclear related technologies in the country does not cause undue risk to employees, patients, the public or the environment.

Namibia also cooperates with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the country has in the past benefited from this international body's projects.

This year, the country through its technical cooperation with IAEA has a budget of N\$10 million for its activities.

One of the major challenges Namibia faces, according to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Social Services, Kahijoro Kahuure, is the lack of human resource capacity.

Namibia features among the top five global producers of yellow cake after Canada, Australia, Kazakhstan and Russia.

Since 1976, Rössing Uranium mine has been operating in the country with the second mine Langer Heinrich entering the industry in late 2006. By last year September, 40 exclusive prospecting uranium licences and 12 mining licences had already been issued.

This “uranium rush” came on the assumption that nuclear power might fill the world's current energy gaps.

The minister assured that Government will ensure the nation fully benefits from the advanced application of nuclear technology.