

CANGO's Submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee

We the NGOs of Swaziland under the Umbrella of the Coordinating Assembly wish to submit the following to the Committee:

1. The Funding modality of NGOs: NGOs are funded by foreign overseas donors. These funding institutions have interest in different areas ranging from pure philanthropic and humanitarian through development based interests. The funds may be contributed by governments, businesses and individuals to external International NGOs, churches and foundations or directly to local NGOs. Very few NGOs receive funding from the Swaziland government through subventions and these subventions are usually a small part of their requirements.
2. Since the release of the news that the government of Swaziland was planning to purchase the executive Jet, donors and funders have repeatedly asked many questions to their grantees regarding; the economic status of the country; whether the government action reflected prudent fiscal discipline; why should their funds be channeled to Swaziland if she can afford such luxury of an expensive Jet;

The question of government's failure to declare the current food crisis an emergency and the negligible government's contribution to the food relief situation also raises many comments. It is not understood how a government can propose to purchase a jet but fail to declare an emergency in which so many people are facing starvation. (Present number according to the Government's VAC assessment is 29,000 - accounting for about 30% of the national population).

3. It is the first time that proposals on disaster appeal sent by NGOs has received very minimal attention from traditional humanitarian funding institutions such as the Action of Churches Together (ACT), International Red Cross etc.
4. To date a number of NGOs have had their both their normal project and disaster funding suspended, including the German and Italian Aid that was supposed to assist the food relief efforts. The suspension, we are told, is pending the government's decision on the purchase of the Jet.
5. One NGO has recently closed shop and some are having difficulty in running their programmes due to lack of funds. It is a fact that there has been a drop in the level of donor funding over the years, but the issue of the Jet combined with issues of the rule of law has even worsened the situation.

6. Our donors, particularly from Europe, are claiming that their own Heads of States are not owning jets, hence they argue, why should they give their money/support to a country where it is planned that the head of state is about to purchase a state-of-the-art private jet.

Local NGOs concerns with the purchase of the Jet are as follows:

1. From our view, it appears that it is ill timed given the current poverty level where over 66% of the population is living under the poverty line, around thirty percent (297,000) of the citizens are facing starvation due to the failure of rains in the past two planting seasons, the escalating problem of HIV/AIDS which has produced high dependence and over 35,000 orphans in a couple of years and the not impressive economic situation where over 30% of the people are unemployed. Assessments carried out to determine those qualifying for food aid have revealed that over 11% of the households are headed by children and almost half have no resident able bodied male.
2. Funders are questioning whether Swaziland is deserving, that is needy and this has resulted in low flow of donor funds to the NGOs in the country.
3. The NGOs are also concerned about the Security of the Head of State, His Majesty if the jet is purchased. A plane owned by the Kingdom is a more vulnerable target for terrorist acts than chartered or commercial flights.

NGOs remain committed to serving the disadvantaged and marginalised people of our society and where mandated and able act as their voice and service providers.

It is our view as the Non-Governmental Organisations in Swaziland that the purchase of the Jet will seriously undermine efforts to improve the livelihoods of the poor. This will make the national vision embraced by the National Development Strategy (NDS) to remain a dream that the country will never attain.

We therefore appeal to government to reconsider its position based on the above factors and drop this intended purchase until such time that the country can afford such project.

Submitted by CANGO – 3rd January 2003