

FULL STORY

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Calls to account for political party funding

BY: JO-MARÉ DUDDY

THE more than N\$156 million the taxpayer will fork out between 2009 and 2012 to finance local political parties is veiled in secrecy, as all efforts have fallen flat to force these parties to be accountable, a workshop to promote transparency in political finance was told on Friday.

Finance Permanent Secretary Calle Schlettwein, although stressing the importance of public financing in a vibrant democracy, said it was crucial that such funding should be regulated and rule-based.

Schlettwein officially launched a study on political finance, jointly driven by the Namibia Institute for Democracy and Transparency International. The study forms part of a wider one in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Graham Hopwood, Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), said that the Auditor General in 2002 already indicated that he would seek the advice from government lawyers on how parties could be compelled to account for the money they receive from the State.

In 2004, the Speaker of the National Assembly (NA) announced that a law would be passed to place restrictions on how parties could spend public funds, Hopwood said. "Efforts to ensure accountability have fallen flat. No one mentions the issue – a situation that suits the parties receiving the funds," he said.

Currently 0,2 per cent of the total State revenue from the previous financial year is allocated to the funding of political parties in a given financial year.

This amount is then divided among the parties in the NA proportionally based on the number of votes received in the previous election.

In the last financial year, Swapo with 55 seats received N\$12,5 million. The Congress of Democrats (CoD) (five seats) received N\$1,1 million, the DTA (four seats) N\$916 000, while Nudo and the UDF (both three seats) got N\$687 000 each. The Republican Party (RP) and Monitor Aksiegroep (MAG) (both with one seat) received N\$229 000 each.

The parties can spend this money as they like.

The current Electoral Act only requires parties to disclose foreign funding.

If a political party refuses to disclose its foreign funding, the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) can cancel its registration. Such a party can also be fined N\$12 000 and/or receive a jail sentence of three years.

Hopwood said political parties do not follow the ECN's stipulations on foreign funding, "having seen it as unworkable".

"A situation exists where parties that argue for transparency and accountability when it comes to government expenditure, are being unaccountable concerning their own use of public funds.

"This issue is not taken up by any party – only civil society can raise the matter," Hopwood said.

Schlettwein said a strong obligation rests on political parties to disclose and have their funds audited, as it is public money they work with.

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