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Geingob supports BIG - by Staff Reporter

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WINDHOEK – Trade and Industry Minister, Hage Geingob says the cost of the Basic Income Grant (BIG) to Namibia is not an issue because the country has abundant natural resources, which could be levied to raise money for the grant. “If people remain hungry, there won’t be any peace,” Geingob told the visiting Brazilian Senator on Tuesday.

Brazilian Senator Eduardo Suplicy, an advocate of a universal basic income to people around the world as a means of eradicating absolute poverty, met different Namibian leaders, including President Hifikepunye Pohamba, Prime Minister Nahas Angula, Minister of Trade and Industry Hage Geingob and Swapo Party Chief Whip Professor Peter Katjavivi.

Geingob reiterated his support for the grant and said Namibia needs the will- power to be able to implement the grant.

Geingob has openly supported the grant as a means to prevent destitution.

He was among the first persons to donate to the BIG pilot fund in August 2007.

Geingob said many people including politicians are not against BIG, but want the grant to be paid to vulnerable people who need it the most and not every Namibian citizen.

Geingob advised the BIG coalition to relook their strategy and to enlist the support of the private sector.

President Hifikepunye Pohamba has rejected the idea of a Basic Income Grant saying distributing free money would encourage laziness.

Chief Whip, Professor Peter Katjavivi said it would be misplaced to go against the Basic Income Grant (BIG), a concept whose intention is to rescue a dire situation.

“We don’t have the luxury of choosing. If the government is not part of it, well and good, but we cannot be against an idea that seeks to improve people’s lives,” Katjavivi, whose interest in BIG was sparked during his tenure as Director-General of the National Planning Commission, said.

He added that BIG has become an important tool because systems that used to govern co-existence, such as ubuntu have been eroded.

He said judging by what happened at Otjivero, BIG has given people a sense of hope that they can stand on their own feet and start doing things for themselves. Due to the interest that the Otjivero experiment has created, Katjavivi said he would ask one of the Parliamentary Standing Committees to get involved.

He commended the BIG Coalition for their work and like Geingob, suggested that the coalition identify other partners that would buy into the concept.

“Just as you cannot stop the rain from falling, you cannot stop people who are motivated by the desire to assist the vulnerable,” he added.

Meanwhile, Suplicy added that the introduction of the Bolsa Familia Programme in his country has reduced absolute poverty and inequality in Brazil.

“The most important advantage of the Citizens Basic Income is that it raised everyone’s level of dignity and freedom,” Suplicy says in his booklet, Towards the Citizen’s Basic Income.

Earlier, Suplicy visited Otjivero, whose residents said they want President Pohamba to visit the settlement for them to share their life experiences of the past three years of receiving the Basic Income Grant with him.

He also visited the Otjivero Primary School where he distributed and also read his children’s book on the Citizen’s Basic Income entitled “One Happy Story,” to the learners.

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