

“Everyone is a performer.”



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21 May 2024

PRESS RELEASE

ǀAONI //AES

"A tale of the ǀAonin (Topnaar) people of Namibia."

The National Theatre of Namibia (NTN) is excited to announce the upcoming theatre production, "ǀAoni //Aes" The play presented through the theatre's co-production program, will shed light on the cultural heritage and contemporary challenges of the ǀAonin (Topnaar) people of Namibia.

"ǀAonin //Aes" will be performed in the Erongo and Khomas regions between 12 June and 20 July 2024. Written and directed by NTN's Artistic Director, Nelago Shilongoh, this production seeks to portray the rich heritage of the ǀAonin people, their deep connection to the Namibian coastline, historical experiences and contemporary issues faced such as access to decision-making particularly in ocean governance and land management.

Co-produced with the University of Namibia (UNAM) and supported by the One Ocean Hub programme, funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), the production aims to promote inclusive decision-making for a sustainable blue economy. One Ocean Hub is an international research program dedicated to promoting fair and inclusive decision-making for a healthy ocean, ensuring that both people and the planet flourish. This collaboration can contribute to the ongoing development of a policy and action plan for Namibia's sustainable blue economy.

Speaking on the importance of the partnership, Professor Alex Kanyimba, Country Director of One Ocean Hub Namibia, stated, *"The partnership with the NTN offers an opportunity to enhance our action on transdisciplinary research methods. Non-academic actors become key agents in the ocean research process, informing stakeholders about the management of the Namibian ocean. The artistic approach engages stakeholders to revive spiritual and cultural connections to the ocean through art, storytelling, and theatre. This methodology can assist One Ocean Hub Namibia in reaching diverse policymakers and integrating marginalized voices into policy and ocean governance spaces."*

The ǀAonin's cultural livelihoods have always depended heavily on ocean resources, livestock, and the harvesting of the !nara melon endemic to the Namib Desert. Historically, they were forcibly displaced from their coastal dwellings, with access to marine resources restricted through legal and colonial exclusion processes. They continue to be excluded from decision-making in contemporary Namibia. The community now resides in 14 farm settlements along the lower valley of the !Khuseb River and in coastal urban centers.

The Acting Chief of the ǀAonin Traditional Authority, Honorable Stoffel Anamab expressed, *"We cannot let the ǀAonin community suffer any longer without their rightful benefits. We hope this play will raise awareness and empower us to fight for justice and regain what is rightfully ours. Let's stand together and make a difference!"*

The production features Namibian theatre actors Dawie Engelbrecht, Chantell /Uiras (Diolini), and Hazel Hinda, who have worked closely with the ǀAonin in interviews, discussions, and consultative presentations. Together with Shilongoh, they have devised an impactful and immersive theatre work that invites audiences into the heritage and experiences of the ǀAonin.

Shilongoh reflected that the transdisciplinary research and theatre-making approach aligns with the NTN's strategy of developing critical Namibian stories for the stage and curating underrepresented narratives. She further added, *"This is a story that will touch many Namibians, as it echoes much of our shared experience of displacement and inaccessibility. At the same time, it is also a celebratory gathering, reminding us of the rich*

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ecological and cultural backgrounds we come from. We invite Namibians from different walks of life to witness and reflect on this story."

"**ǀAonin //Aes**" will be performed for the general public and key stakeholders, to encourage important discussions and reflections that will help shape policy recommendations. The performances will be in English, Khoekhoegowab, and Afrikaans.

The premiere will take place in Walvis Bay on 12 June at the Walvis Bay Municipal Hall and Narraville Community Hall. Following this, there will be performances in Swakopmund on 13 June at Coastal High School, and in Utuseb on 14 June. In the Khomas region, the production will be staged at the Katutura Community Hall on 21 June and conclude at the NTN's Auditorium, 19-20 July, 2024.

All shows are free to attend, with free tickets for the 19th and 20th July shows available from 01 July 2024, exclusively at the NTN offices.

For more information, please visit www.ntn.org.na or contact, 061 374 400/ 081 366 3255.

Issued by: Ms. Desiree Mentor

NTN Public Relations Officer



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