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**VICE CHANCELLOR'S TALKING NOTES ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIGNING OF THE VISIT TO BIUST BY THE MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE OKAVANGO DIAMOND COMPANY MR MMETLA MASIRE - 23 MARCH 2023 ZQAA**

1. Rre Mmetla Masire, the Managing Director of the Okavango Diamond Company (ODC) and your traveling delegation from Gaborone; the Executive Management Team of BIUST, Deans, Directors and Heads of Departments here present; Ladies and Gentlemen, I greet you all.

2. We extend a warm welcome to our visitors today and I wish to express our deepest appreciation for their visit to our campus; actually their first ever visit here. We are meeting in person in almost a fortnight following a meeting in Gaborone between our senior officials. The BIUST team, led by the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research Development and Innovation, Professor Abraham Atta Ogwu, visited the ODC in Gaborone two Fridays back, to appreciate first hand experience of your facilities.

3. It is quite admirable that we are meeting in quick succession given the stumbles that we have encountered since 2019. I am happy that we are finally catching the steam that's required to propel an ambition as big as the one we carry between our two institutions. I hope that we can maintain the momentum and get things going because we so desperately need to do so. AS we all know, there is a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which was negotiated in 2019 but was never concluded and signed. That should be one easy assignment which we must conclude as soon as possible.

4. In 2019 again, we had discussed the possibility of signing a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA), specifically to facilitate a research collaboration involving ODC's diamond sorting instrument called the Percentage Cut Machine (PCM). The intention was to have a BIUST Msc student to undertake some research on the PCM with a view to investigate

how it could be optimized through automation and enhanced modern technologies. Actually, we had identified the most qualified student at the time but the advent of the COVID-19 in early 2020 disrupted our plan. The student would later complete her studies and has since graduated from BIUST.

5. However, as they would often say when such circumstances arise, all is never lost unless you lose the edge and the commitment to start all over again. Like the old song says, "Here We Go Again" and I am quite certain that we are all raring to go now. This time around I pray that we stay the course to push ourselves to the next limits and beyond. We owe it to ourselves; and we owe it to the nation.

6. Diamond mining has been the supreme hinge of Botswana's economy for the longest time and it is only logical that an institution like BIUST must find a niche somewhere in the value chain and along the whole process. Understandably so because ODC, being a wholly-owned Government of Botswana company responsible for marketing and selling of about twenty-five percent of the rough diamond production from DEBSWANA mines, creates natural opportunities for research and development in the diamond beneficiation effort. Please underline ROUGH DIAMONDS here because beneficiation means value addition and down-stream processing from the grey stones to glittering pieces of jewelry. One way or the other, we must locate a hold for our hands right throughout the process, from the beginning to the end.

7. Instead of just marketing and selling rough diamonds, it would be our dream as nation to see ODC getting involved in the whole production cycle from the pit to the finger and to our necks. We want to work with ODC to explore how this ambition can be actualized and we know that it is very possible. There is nothing wrong with taking baby-steps for now until we can

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master the art of localizing the whole process of diamond beneficiation and that of other mineral endowment which our country is blessed with.

8. BIUST was set up by the Government of Botswana as part of the broader scheme for import substitution by localizing some economic activities through locally-brewed research in engineering, science and technology. We look at ODC as that partner which can offer the opportunity to unlock that potential and help to broaden and diversify our national economic base.

9. Ladies and gentlemen, going back to the PCM issue, we appreciate the opportunity that was granted to the BIUST team to see the machine in action when it visited OCD in Gaborone recently. From our team's observations, we have a strong view that our researchers can find solutions to address its inefficiencies. The machine's sorting capabilities can be investigated by our mechatronics and electronics teams to devise a permanent solution to the problem. We can still identify a student or two of them to research on the machine under the supervision of a select team of faculty researchers.

10. To explore more areas of possible collaboration, we can also dispatch a more operational team of researchers to Gaborone to appreciate in more detail which other areas of research partnerships we can establish. According to the programme of the day, the visitors will have a chance to tour some of our laboratories and other facilities so that they can also appreciate our capabilities. Besides the diamond sorting machine project which we have already identified, I can assure you that there are plenty other applications which our researchers can design from scratch.

11. I am certain that there are sufficient potential areas of collaboration which would include, among others, the following:

- a) Research and Development where we could collaborate on research and development projects related to diamond mining,

processing, and trading. This could lead to the development of new technologies, processes and techniques that could improve the efficiency of operations at ODC.

- b)** Training and Education where BIUST can provide tailor-made training and skills development programmes for ODC employees in areas such as engineering, computer science and artificial intelligence improve skills and knowledge of its employees.
- c)** Through our recently established BIUST Foundation, we can collaborate with ODC on community engagement projects that can benefit the local communities. This could include impactful initiatives related to education, health and social development.

12. As I conclude my remarks, Director of Ceremonies, I wish to express our gratitude once again for the opportunity to build a relationship with ODC. I want to urge our teams to work together to conclude the draft Memorandum of Understanding which has been pending. An MOU is a very important tool that formalizes relationships between institutions and it also gives clear definitions of the parameters of engagement.

13. With those few remarks, Once again, thank you very much Rre Masire and your team for joining us today and we look forward to a productive meeting and inspiring visit.

14. Thank you all for your kind attention.