

**Remarks by Ambassador Joyce A. Barr
San Girls Conference
Katutura Multi Purpose Youth Center
May 8, 2007 at 9:30 a.m.**

It's a pleasure for me to join all of you at this official opening of the San Girls Conference. This conference will provide you with the skills and exposure to help you take control of your lives and your future.

I am especially pleased that FAWENA has organized activities to help you build your resilience, self-esteem, and leadership skills. This will help you to perform well in school.

The Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Program, which is sponsoring this conference, is part of the Africa Education Initiative. This is one of the initiatives that the American people use to help address the major problems facing Africa today.

As you all know, poverty, discrimination and access are huge barriers to girls' education in many parts of the world. In Namibia, many disadvantaged girls are unable to enroll in primary schools, and many of those who do enroll, drop-out of school before completing grade 7. Girls who do not complete school are less likely to achieve their full potential. The U.S. is proud to fund a program that is helping a talented and gifted group of girls to stay in school and do well in school. It is part of the basic education strategy that we support through USAID in Namibia.

As of 2006, the U.S. Government has provided approximately \$385 million Namibian dollars to improve the quality of education and lessen the impact of HIV/AIDS on the education sector in Namibia. Currently, the Girls' Scholarship Program is supporting 950 vulnerable girls in Namibian primary schools and 100 of the scholarships go to San girls. The scholarship program pays for school uniforms, supplies, boarding and lodging fees, and psycho-social support. I hope that programs like this will enable girls from San families to enroll and complete their primary and secondary education, and provide the skills and confidence for you to pursue even higher levels of education.

Educating girls strengthens Namibian society as a whole. Educated girls grow up to be women who are better prepared to make informed personal and political choices, and contribute to their families and communities.

Today's educated girls will become tomorrow's teachers, business women, and scientists.

I encourage you all to take advantage of what you will be taught here at the Conference. You have wonderful role models in Mrs. Paula /Ui/o/oo and Mrs. Neshani Andreas of FAWENA. These role models show you that you can become whatever you want to be -- teachers, doctors, and even Namibian Ambassadors to America! Your achievements will uplift San communities all over Namibia.

I also want to thank the conference organizers. We applaud your commitment to making a difference to Namibian girls generally and to San girls specifically. Your efforts will help to enhance the empowerment of San girls in Namibia.

I once again thank you all for participating in this conference and wish you the very best in your effort to help San girls through improved education.