

**Statement by Ambassador Joyce A. Barr
Official Launch of the
Namibian Democracy Support Centre
November 22, 2005, 10:00-12:00
Parliament Building, Room C1**

Honorable Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab;
Honorable Chairman of the National Council, Mr. Asser Kapere;
Honorable Minister of Regional, Local Government and Housing and Rural
Development, Mr. John Pandeni;
Honorable Dr. Mosé Tjitendero;
Mr. Kandindima Nehova;
Members of Parliament;
Executive Director of the Namibian Democracy Support Centre; Mr. Moses Ndjarakana;
Executive Director of the Namibia Institute for Democracy Mr. Theunis Keulder
Members of the Namibia Institute for Democracy;
Distinguished Invited Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to be here with you today to celebrate an exciting milestone in Namibia, the launching of the Namibian Democracy Support Centre (NDSC).

Since independence, Parliament has made remarkable strides in establishing itself as a strong pillar of the Namibian government that provides an effective forum for open, multi-partisan, democratic debate. We applaud you for this impressive achievement, especially in light of Namibia's pre-independence history.

And while we are talking about accomplishments, I'd like to make special mention of the previous Speaker, the Honorable Tjitendero, and the previous Chairman of the National Council, the Honorable Nehova. These men led the new Parliament with great foresight and vigor from 1990 until March 2005. During their tenure, the Speaker and Chairman guided the process of transforming Parliament. I would like to note just a few examples of the progress made over the past 15 years:

- The formalization of parliamentary procedures and the training of staff to support Members of Parliament;
- The establishment of standing committees and the introduction of public hearings;
- The institutionalization of the induction program for novice parliamentarians and the practice of conducting outreach programs to all portions of the country; and
- The establishment of electronic channels of communication and of Parliament as a home base for national and community-based media, to help facilitate direct linkages between the Namibian public and its elected representatives.

Leadership and prudence remains instrumental in building Namibia's Parliament. We are confident that Speaker Gurirab and Chairman Kapere will continue to lead both the National Assembly and the National Council with vision and wisdom.

The U.S. Government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has been an enthusiastic development partner of the Namibian Parliament for many years. At the request of the Namibian government and the legislature, we began providing technical assistance to Parliament in 1995. In total, the U.S. Government has contributed roughly N\$ 82.2 million to assist Parliament and support civil society.

Programs funded by the U.S. government provided training and technical support that helped strengthen democratic procedures and principles in the National Assembly and the National Council to build the capacity of parliamentarians to speak and listen to Namibian citizens. The U.S. Government also implemented a Civil Society program to provide technical and financial assistance to emerging civic groups who wanted to make their voices heard and put their issues before the government.

As a result of this assistance, Namibian NGOs and community-based groups were able to initiate advocacy activities on a wide range of issues that were directed at all levels of government. They made numerous submissions on pending legislation, in response to formal and informal opportunities made available by Parliament. Through these activities, the civic groups established important links and helped to enrich the legislative process. We are proud to have supported efforts to build Parliament, support civil society, and to have contributed to the remarkable successes achieved.

The constructive interaction between the citizenry and their elected representatives is a foundation of democratic governance, therefore we are very pleased to be able to continue to support both Parliament and civil society. We are extremely happy to have helped establish the NDSC, as an autonomous organization that is dedicated to strengthening the interaction between Parliament, other government institutions, and civil society in a planned manner.

The formation of the NDSC is an indication of the commitment of the government and civil society organizations to a partnership to sustain and strengthen an open, accountable, and participatory democracy in Namibia. To date, tremendous progress has been made, but we know that the NDSC and its partner members will encounter challenges. We encourage you to stay the course despite obstacles as the task of institutionalizing a successful democratic government takes much time and effort. Even after 226 years, my country still seeks to further advance the goals of democracy.

As you may know, this month Namibia was one of only three countries out of 29 lower middle-income countries selected as eligible for development assistance funds from the Millennium Challenge Account, which is funded by the U.S. government. Namibia's achievements in democratic governance specifically its record in "ruling justly, investing in its people and encouraging economic freedom," were key to its selection. Congratulations!

Namibia's government can now prepare a proposal for how it would use increased development funds to promote economic growth and alleviate poverty. This is an exciting opportunity for Namibia! We are encouraged by the possibility of greater collaboration between the United States and Namibia on behalf of the social, political, and economic empowerment of Namibians.

In closing, Honorable Speaker Gurirab, Honorable Chairman Kapere, I would once again like to congratulate all involved on the launch of this collaborative effort and wish you great success in the future. We look forward to working with you and supporting the efforts of the Namibian Democracy Support Center.

Thank you.