

**Remarks by Joyce A. Barr,
U.S. Ambassador to Namibia
THIRD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN
WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA
February 9, 2005**

Your Excellency, Dr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia
Honorable Ministers
Honorable Governors
Honorable Deputy Ministers
Honorable Members of Parliament
Regional and Local Government Officials
Fellow Members of the Diplomatic Corps and other International
Organization Representatives
Distinguished Invited Guests
Director of Ceremonies
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am deeply honored to be here at the Third National Conference on Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC). This conference addresses one of Namibia's most important tasks -- to ensure that Namibia's most vulnerable citizens receive the care and support they need to become the next generation of leaders.

Your Excellency, your presence here today demonstrates that Namibia is blessed by committed leadership that works on behalf of orphans and vulnerable children, their families, and their circles of support at the community-level. Your presence demonstrates once again how the Namibian people, along with close partners, can mobilize local and international resources to overcome the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The partnerships here today – that harness energy from all sectors – bring to mind Namibia's struggle for liberation, when you also had to endure great hardship, make great sacrifices, and identify great leaders to achieve your goals of freedom, justice, and independence. Namibia will succeed, just as you have in the past.

Namibia is ahead of many countries in developing sound policies and implementing a National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS to prevent the spread of HIV and mitigate its impact on society. Your 2004 prevalence survey shows that the rate of HIV infection among pregnant women declined. This is a heartening and hopeful trend and a tribute to your collective commitment and talents.

Last month, with your help and hospitality, we hosted a visit from the Assistant U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, and Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Mark Dybul. He was impressed by the cooperation and positive response of both Government and NGOs to the HIV epidemic in Namibia, and particularly impressed by the joint response to the plight of these children. This conference comes at a momentous time in our bilateral relationship. After Dr. Dybul's visit, we confirmed that under the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the U.S. Government will be able to commit \$216 million Namibian dollars to Namibia for 2005. This is more money per person than in any other Emergency Plan country. High on our list of priorities is helping Namibia to plan for, ensure the rights of, and provide care for the growing population of OVCs.

In addition to support for OVC programs, all U.S. agencies in Namibia - the Centers for Disease Control in the Department of Health and Human Services; the Peace Corps, the United States Agency for International Development, the Department of Defense, and the Embassy itself – also provide resources for treatment, care, prevention of mother to child transmission, voluntary counselling and testing, and prevention under the guidance of Medium Term Plan III.

We are fortunate to be a part of this conference and to be able to support its realization. Under the leadership of Honorable Minister Ndaitwah, Ministry of Women's Affairs and Child Welfare and her staff, along with the efforts of the Permanent Task Force on Orphans and Vulnerable Children, this conference has become a vital mechanism to reach out to all individuals and organizations in Namibia that are so committed to meeting the needs of these children.

We commend those who drafted your new OVC Policy. We understand that Namibia is one of only five countries in the world to have a national policy. We also commend the way the conference is incorporating the meaningful participation of this special group by holding a parallel session that gives children a voice in the matters that affect them. Their input at this conference will not only help build their self-esteem, leadership skills, and resilience, but also ensure that we remain focused on conference outcomes that are relevant and practical.

We admire the way in which you have candidly identified the remaining challenges such as the need to streamline access to government grants and to develop a comprehensive data base and system to register orphans and vulnerable children. This openness will serve Namibia well in finding innovative ways to deal with this complicated issue.

We were also pleased to see that one of the conference goals is to share information. Brochures on government grants and services are being distributed. The new National OVC Policy document is published in several local languages. This type of information is both timely and enormously useful. Congratulations to everyone who has worked so hard to make all of this possible.

The mandate is clear: the children with us today represent the orphans and vulnerable children in Namibia. They are our challenge, our hope, and our reason for being here. The U.S. Government is honored to be a full partner with Namibia in this important task. We wish you success in this conference and success in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Thank you.

Joyce Barr
U.S. Ambassador to Namibia