



**Remarks by U.S. Ambassador Dennise Mathieu  
Launch of the *Writing by Kids* Program  
January 28, 2008 @ 10:00 a.m.  
Hotel Kleines Heim, Windhoek West**

**Honorable Minister Nangolo Mbumba, Minister of Education;**

**Director of Ceremonies and Undersecretary of Formal Education, Mr. Alfred Ilukena;**

**Chairperson of the BES Project Steering Committee and Director of the Directorate of Program Quality Assurance, Mr. Charles Kabajani;**

**Friends and colleagues from the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and the BES III project;**

**Authors and Teachers, Parents and Caregivers:**

**Distinguished Guests;**

**Members of the Media;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

It is a pleasure to be here with you today to celebrate the launch of the new reader entitled, "*Our Journals*," produced under the *Writing by Kids* project. Recently, I read *Our Journals*, and the sense of pride and care with which the children wrote and illustrated their entries came shining through.

As the new U.S. Ambassador to Namibia, I took great pleasure in reading the journal entries. There is no better way to learn about a country and its culture than to hear the personal stories of its people – I thank you for providing me with this opportunity to read these insightful, engaging entries.

I understand this is the final book in the series of readers written and illustrated by Namibians for Namibian children. This has been an excellent project. The books focus on life experiences that are moving, entertaining and culturally-relevant. I'm sure they have helped to sharpen reading and writing skills; promoted a love for reading and self-expression; and taught important life skills.

Since 2004, the United States Government has proudly supported this innovative project as part of its partnership with the Ministry of Education to help improve the quality of education in Namibia, support Namibia's orphans and vulnerable children and mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on the education system.

The stories in *Our Journals* give a glimpse of the tragic, sobering effects that HIV and AIDS have on the lives of so many children in Namibia and show the impact that the epidemic has on families and individuals. Through the journals, you also gain an appreciation of these young Namibians -- and of their strength, compassion, and commitment to help combat HIV and AIDS.

These journal collections will promote open classroom discussions. As parents, we know that discussing subjects, even those that can be difficult to talk about such as HIV/AIDS, is one of the best means of education and, ultimately, prevention. As a result of this project, Namibian learners now have a new and powerful tool to help in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

I want to especially recognize the young authors who are here with us today. The fifty journal entries that are published in this book were selected by a committee as a showcase of the best work completed by 480 learners and their teachers who worked on personal journal writing over the past year. Congratulations and may the exposure and experience you have gained from this project propel you to grow into fully fledged, confident Namibian writers.

I'm sure your fellow learners throughout Namibia will enjoy reading and learning from stories that speak to them, reflect their culture and their life experiences.

In conclusion, I commend and congratulate everyone who worked to make this collection possible:

- The Ministry of Education for its leadership and commitment to the program and to promoting a culture of reading and writing in Namibian schools;
- Our partner, AED, for their energetic and innovative work with the teachers and learners;
- Shell Namibia and Pollination Publishers for their generous assistance in bringing these books into our hands, and Standard Bank of Namibia for their assistance with the earlier series;
- The dedicated educators who eagerly embraced this project, acquiring new professional skills and tools to enhance their ability to teach writing and reading and pass on the joy of reading and personal expression;

- And, most importantly, the young people who worked so hard, took the opportunity and bravely invited us into their lives. They have created a lasting contribution to Namibia's education system and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

I share in Minister Mbumba's pride in and admiration for all the new Namibian authors, learners and teachers alike, and those who support them.