

**Remarks by U.S. Government Representative  
Gary Newton, Mission Director for USAID/Namibia  
at the launch of the Catholic Health Service's  
VCT/PMTCT/ART Integrated Services Centre at Oshikuku  
22 September 2004**

Honourable Governor of Omusati, Mr. Sacky Kayone  
Honourable Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services, Richard Kamwi  
Father Paulinus Uzoma  
Representatives of Catholic Health Services, SMA and FHI,  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Elizabeth Onjoro-Messiack of the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator,  
Fellow Employees of the U.S. Government,  
Master of Ceremonies,  
Members of the Media,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

The AIDS epidemic is a curse and a calamity in whatever country it takes hold

But the epidemic seems a special calamity for Namibia. A nation that emerged from an agonizing and prolonged birth with great promise and potential -- now finds this promise and potential undermined by AIDS.

As President Nujoma wrote in the *Vision 2030* report, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is "...likely to severely retard Namibia's achievement of its development goals and objectives...", and affect the country's ability to provide health, education and other services, and impoverish individuals at the household level.

- Since 1996, HIV/AIDS has been the leading cause of death in Namibia. By 2005, an estimated 100,000 Namibians will have died of AIDS. Over 70% of Namibians surveyed in 2003 reported that a family member or close friend died of AIDS (up from 40% in 1999).
- As a result of all this death and infection, Namibians born this year can expect fewer years of life. Life expectancy at birth declined from 60 in 1990 to 43 in 2001 and continues to decline.
- 14% of children under 15 in Namibia have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS.
- This year, there are an estimated 131,120 orphans in Namibia, 70% attributable to HIV/AIDS.
- Every day in Namibia, 42 more children become orphans.

- One in seven teachers was infected with HIV in 2002.
- \$196,000,000 in Gross Domestic Product is estimated to be lost annually to HIV/AIDS (1992-2002).
- An estimated 95,900 Namibians of working age will have died of AIDS by 2005; 10.5% of Namibia's total workforce.

In spite of AIDS' grim toll, mercifully, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the prospects of controlling the epidemic in Namibia and minimizing the destruction it will cause.

To mention a few:

- We can be optimistic because Namibia and its leadership have a history of overcoming daunting challenges. The resilience, resourcefulness, the will and fortitude demonstrated in the independence struggle gives hope that this new struggle against AIDS can ultimately be won.
- We can be optimistic because Namibia recognizes that HIV/AIDS is a vital threat to the nation's future. President Nujoma stated in Namibia's Vision 2030 report, *"If we are to survive as a nation, perhaps the greatest challenge we face now is to eradicate HIV/AIDS."*
- We can be optimistic because the Ministry of Health and Social Services has the leadership and vision to plan, coordinate and help implement an effective national response.
- We can be optimistic because there is a sound strategy to confront and control the epidemic. The National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS ( Third Medium Term Plan 2004-2009) serves as an excellent guide to focus and coordinate our collective efforts.
- We can be optimistic because there's a talented group of partners pulling together to implement the strategy. This committed coalition of leaders, managers, technicians, and volunteers from the public, private, religious and NGO communities will prevail. This gathering today illustrates the power of this partnership -- the Ministry of Health and Social Services, Catholic Health Services, political leaders from Oshikuku, Oshikuku Hospital staff, Catholic Aids Action, the Social Marketing Association (SMA) and Family Health International (FHI).
- We can be optimistic because Namibia now has the financial resources to begin implementing its national strategy and begin scaling-up services. The U.S. Government's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief has made it possible for us to increase our financial support to your program substantially. This year, the U.S. Government is providing 160 million Namibian dollars for HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment. Next year, we are expecting a 50% increase in funding. In

addition, Namibia expects to receive US \$105 million from the Global Fund to which the U.S. Government is the largest contributor, accounting for 36% of all pledges to date. These resources are in addition to the significant resources coming from Government of the Republic of Namibia. It is of course true that a still greater investment will need to be made by all sectors of Namibian society for these vital services to be accessible to all who need them on a sustainable basis.

- Last but not least, the launching of this Center gives great cause for optimism. As a result of the excellent partnership among the MoHSS, CHS and international and local organizations, the people of Oshikuku, Omusati and neighboring regions now have greater access to HIV/AIDS care, support and treatment. The capable and caring staff of this Center will provide the community with the information and confidential services people need to protect newborn children from HIV transmission; to learn one's own HIV status; to remain free of HIV; and for people already infected, to prolong life with ARV treatment.

In closing, it's an honor to be here today representing the United States Mission in Namibia at the opening of your new HIV/AIDS Integrated Services Center. The U.S. Government, and the American people we represent, are proud to be able to assist such a promising and important effort. We appreciate and admire all of you who are fighting the good fight -- day-in and day-out -- to save the Namibian people from the ravages of HIV/AIDS. The U.S. Government team in Namibia led by the U.S. Embassy, the Centers for Disease Control, the Peace Corps, and the U.S. Agency for International Development stand beside you and support you. You are the heroes in this struggle and you will win.