

**Remarks by
Gary Newton, Mission Director for USAID/Namibia,
at the Official Launch of the
New Start VCT Centre at Keetmanshoop
1 March 2005 at 09:00**

The Right Honorable Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia,
Reverend Doctor Witbooi
Honoured Community Leaders
Members of Catholic AIDS Action and the Catholic Church
Representatives of the Social Marketing Association and Family Health International
Staff and Volunteers of the New Start Center
People of Keetmanshoop

HIV/AIDS is a daunting threat which is recognized from the largest capitals to the smallest settlements. Every place on earth is touched in some way. In the United States of America, we may have as many as a million people infected with HIV – some who are not aware of their status. HIV/AIDS is everyone's problem and we must unite to defeat this epidemic.

Namibia has one of the highest HIV rates in the world with an estimated 19.8 percent of the adult population infected. We learned in December from the Ministry of Health and Social Services that the rate of infection in Keetmanshoop is estimated at 16.3 percent among pregnant women, the same as the infection rate in 2002. While this is not as high as other areas of Namibia, it is still a devastating level of infection.

We encourage leaders in Keetmanshoop to talk about the virus, to reduce discrimination, and to make opportunities for discussion on prevention and treatment. We need everyone to take the courageous step to be counseled and tested, and there is no better place than here at this center which will provide a human response for those who are infected, to support them, to embrace them and to help them.

The U.S. Government is honored to support the Catholic AIDS Action (CAA) New Start Centre, through the U.S. Government's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief in partnership with the Government of Namibia.

This New Start Center in Keetmanshoop is a result of an excellent partnership among the community, Catholic AIDS Action, the Catholic Church in Namibia, the Government of Namibia and the U.S. Government. This collaboration has resulted in this beautiful centre you see before you. Here every individual will receive quality, confidential and anonymous services. Let's join together to encourage everyone to use it. Until someone knows their status, there is nothing anyone can do to help and, with antiretroviral therapy available, there is every reason to come forward.

Namibia is one of 15 focus countries under the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which is providing US\$ 15 billion dollars over five years to fight this epidemic. Namibia is receiving more funding per capita than any of the other focus countries. In 2004, Namibia received 127 million Namibian dollars and in 2005 it will receive 216 million Namibian dollars. In addition, the U.S. government has contributed one-third of the resources to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, which will also start to benefit Namibia this year. It is my sincere hope that coupled with these significant investments, the commitment of the Namibian Government and the determination of the Namibian people, that we can conquer this disease.

Under the Emergency Plan, the U.S. Government commits to prevent new infections, to help those who are infected with treatment, and to care for those who have HIV/AIDS and those who are orphaned and made vulnerable by the epidemic. Here in Namibia we are fortunate to be working with the support of a very dynamic Ministry of Health and Social Services under the Government of Namibia's National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS, which is rolling out anti retroviral treatment across the country, and with strong Namibian non-governmental and faith-based organizations such as Catholic AIDS Action.

Although an *Emergency* Plan, the U.S. Government supports building capacity and intends to be involved for the long-term. This is just the first Five year phase.

In closing, we would like to thank the Government of the Republic of Namibia for their cooperation, particularly on this occasion, the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister Hendrik Witbooi. We want to commend all the partners in this enterprise – the Catholic Church in Namibia, Catholic AIDS Action, the Social Marketing Association and Family Health International. Finally a word to the people who will run this New Start Centre. We place our faith in you. You hold the future of this community in your hands.

Thank you.