

**Speech at the launch of Parliament-Online**  
**by USAID Director, Diana Swain**  
**May 31, 2001**

Honorable Speaker Tjitendero,  
Honorable Chairman Nehova,  
Advocate Akumu,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel very privileged to be a part of the launch of Parliament-Online.

I commend the tremendous vision that the Speaker, the Chairman and NDI have shown in initiating and supporting this undertaking and I applaud the diligent and extremely creative work that members of their staffs have applied in bringing Parliament-Online to life.

We are today moving to a world in which whether a country is rich or poor will be largely determined by whether it is fast or slow in responding to changing situations and new opportunities, and whether it is dynamic or static when it comes to acquiring and applying the latest knowledge. It is a fact that fast or slow, dynamic or static will be determined by whether a country is plugged in or not plugged in. Parliament-Online takes Namibia another step closer to being plugged in.

Whereas the industrial revolution transformed our relationship to energy and matter, the information revolution is transforming our relationship to time and distance. In a country as large as Namibia, and with a Parliament as committed as this Parliament is to interacting with its constituency, overcoming distance constraints is critical. Parliament-Online can help to overcome distance constraints and reduce the physical barriers that separate the Namibian people from their elected representatives.

I'm pleased that this launch is being accompanied by a demonstration. To see and experience Parliament-Online is: to immediately understand its potential.

It will enhance the Parliament's efficiency by improving communications internally, regionally, nationally, and internationally and it will strengthen the Parliament's research capabilities by facilitating timely access to the vast stores of information captured on the internet. Strengthened research capabilities can lead to better formulation and scrutiny of legislation.

Just as, if not more importantly, Parliament-Online has the potential to expand the universe of informed Namibian citizens and, as you'll see, it creates a large range of opportunities for civic engagement in the legislative process and for increased and more timely interactions between citizens and their legislators.

Thus, the launch of Parliament-Online is a strong signal of the commitment that the National Assembly and the National Council have to the further consolidation of Namibian democracy. It provides another avenue through which the Constitutional promise [Article I/line (2)] that "all power shall vest in the people of Namibia who shall exercise their sovereignty through the democratic institutions of the State" can be honored.

For Parliament-Online to have its greatest impact, people will need both the will and the capability to use it. Ways must be found to ensure that the average Namibian has access to the technology and the ability to make his or her voice heard. This will be a difficult challenge. But with the concerted efforts of the Parliament, NGOs, the schools and universities, the private sector, and the media, it is a challenge that can be met.

In closing, I would like to again congratulate and express my deep admiration for all those who played a part in making Parliament-Online a reality.

Parliament-Online makes it clear that the Namibian Parliament is a Parliament that is willing to listen. It's now up to the people to speak.