

**Speech by U.S. Chargé d`Affaires, Thurmond Borden  
at the Launch of the Civil Society Development Project  
June 21, 2001**

Representatives of USAID

The Executive Director and Staff of the Namibia Institute for Democracy

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured to be here with you today and be part of the launching of the NID's Civil Society Development Project. I believe this is a very exciting and worthwhile project, as it would involve the people at the grassroots to strengthen the social network of our democracy, which affects all of us in one way or the other. Martin Luther King, Jnr. great American human rights leader, once said:

*We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,  
Tied in a single garment of destiny.  
Whatever affects one directly,  
Affects all indirectly.*

Democracy is not a final product, it is A PROCESS. If this process is to be effective, as an instrument for stable development, it must fit in with the culture of the citizens, the citizens' aspirations, and beyond all, it must be pursued at a pace that the end-users can absorb and are comfortable with. During the last four decades, developing countries have made remarkable progress in the field of social welfare such as life expectancy, mortality rates and education. However, developing countries realise that there are other critical elements necessary to sustain the development efforts. This realisation has led to the inclusion of issues in the developmental process that require more participation from all respective stakeholders. Thus good governance, for Africa in particular, has become a critical issue in the participatory development dialogue.

While the principle of good governance as an essential ingredient for sustainable development is now seen to be universally acceptable, there is yet to emerge a consensus on how best to develop and build good governance practices throughout Africa and the rest of the developing world.

The well-known English philosopher John Locke theorised that the relationship between a country's State and its citizens is based on a social contract. The citizens agree to be governed and the State agrees to govern in the best interest' of the citizens. In an ideal world all citizens are satisfied with the State, which always strive to advance the citizens' interests. Of course we do not live in a perfect world, but the Namibian democratic system goes a long way towards fulfilling its obligations in this regard.

The Namibian government is very open and its citizens have many opportunities to influence public policy through peaceful and if required dynamic interaction with the authorities. Of course this does not mean that dissatisfied citizens must through violent means advocate their cause. This is not the sort of advocacy that we have in mind; rather the opportunity for advocacy must constructively enhance the inherent partnership or social contract between citizens and their representatives in the State.

This partnership requires that citizens must communicate their needs and aspirations to government officials and political representatives in an orderly and peaceful manner. The officials and representatives are duty-bound to listen and engage in dialogue with its citizens to determine goals that are in the national interest to pursue and the best policies for their attainment. If there is a strong link between civil society and the State, legitimate needs and concerns can be identified at an early stage and addressed before they result in undue hardship or cause instability.

Namibia has come a long way in its political development, which started already in the struggle for liberation. With the attainment of Independence, the maturity of our political leaders was manifested in

our Constitution, the supreme law of the land. The Bill of Rights was entrenched and the rights guaranteed thereunder are what lie at the heart of the notion of advocacy. For instance: Article 17 guarantees citizens the right to participate in peaceful political activity intended to influence the composition and policies of the Government. Article 21 guarantees Fundamental Freedoms such as freedom of speech and expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media, the right to assemble peaceably and so forth. Without these freedoms it is impossible for citizens to advocate their government on issues of concern.

Though not formally called advocacy, the avenues that are available to citizens for their input are legion. For example, we have the radio programmes Open Line and Chat Show and all the other radio services of the NBC host similar shows. In these programmes citizens have the chance to raise issues that are of importance to them which often have dimensions of national interest. In a sense this is advocacy since at times feedback to concerns are provided.

The establishment of the Civil Society Development Programme is therefore a welcome initiative by the NID. The provision of training and financial assistance to Namibian NGO's, community based organizations and other civic groups to interact with Government at all levels in order to advocate issues of public interest will go a long way to facilitate a platform for discussions. This will give concrete meaning to the well-known principle of democracy "Government for the people, by the people".

USAID has also played a tremendous role in the establishment of this Advocacy Program by funding the Civil Society Development Programme. USAID has proved to be a genuine partner in our efforts to strengthen our democratic and parliamentary culture. We truly hope that such partnership would continue to grow to mutually benefit all stakeholders.

In conclusion, I would like to thank and congratulate Dr Keulder and his colleagues for a job well done. Without your personal commitment and hard work, the NID would not have come this far. I wish you every success with the project, and look forward to see a meaningful engagement with all parties that have a stake in the well-being of our great nation.

I now have the most singular honour to officially launch the NID's Civil Society Development Programme.

I thank you!