

**Remarks by Her Excellency Ambassador G. Dennise Mathieu
Launch of the Standard Bank Namibia partnership with the
Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program
A. Shipena Secondary School, Katutura Windhoek
September 22, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.**

What an honor to be here today, and to participate in the launch of the Standard Bank partnership with the United States Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program.

While the official name of the program refers only to girls, I want to assure you that boys are now an integral part of the program, and today marks a very important step forward in a public-private partnership to increase educational opportunities for Namibian girls and boys.

Combining the expertise and resources of dedicated, socially responsible companies, such as Standard Bank, and other private organizations, to the talent and dedication of our local partners will ensure sustainability of programs that assist Namibia's orphaned and vulnerable learners.

The public-private partnership that we're launching today builds on the success and the promise of the Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program -- AGSP-- initiated 4 years ago.

As many of you may know, the AGSP program provides support to orphaned and vulnerable learners to go to school, stay in school and do well in school, by providing school uniforms, school supplies, boarding and lodging fees, and counseling support. Standard Bank is joining the United

States to invest in the future of bright young Namibian girls and boys who are orphaned or vulnerable.

Their support, totaling over \$2.5 million Namibian dollars, will enable an additional 200 learners to attend and do well in school over the next five years – enable students to move beyond primary education and reach the goal of graduating from secondary schools.

I'm thrilled that through Standard Bank's commitment, we'll now expand the reach and impact of this United States government-led program. I commend Standard Bank for stepping up to the plate and actively investing in Namibia's economic future, by helping to develop her human capital and helping to develop positive role models for future generations.

As we all know -- especially the civically-minded and socially-motivated bankers here with us today -- investing in the education of the youth today will prepare them to meet life's challenges, and pay huge dividends to these young people, their communities and their country.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the AGSP program has a successful history in Namibia. It first provided assistance to orphaned and vulnerable primary school girls in grades 1-7, through the United States Africa Education Initiative (AEI). Two years ago, we extended support to young women in secondary school grades 8-12, through the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief -- PEPFAR -- and the Africa Education Initiative. Most recently, we've been able to add promising orphaned and vulnerable boys to the program.

Currently, 950 primary school girls and 200 primary school boys are enrolled per year under the AGSP program. Over the past 2 years, the program assisted 545 girls to attend secondary school (340 in 2007 and 205 in 2008). And I'm delighted to inform you that all 340 girls from the first year of the secondary school program passed their respective grades last year. Well done! I expect all our AGSP learners to meet and surpass this standard!

This education partnership with Standard Bank is also important for us all because it's a powerful weapon in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Each additional year of schooling directly translates into better informed and empowered children, who can make good choices and reduce their chances of becoming HIV+. That's why education is often dubbed the "social vaccine." In our fight against HIV/AIDS, each step towards preventing new HIV infections is a brighter step towards Namibia's Vision 2030.

Honorable Minister, we thank you for your leadership and the fine work of the Ministry of Education. Without your support and that of the teachers who are working on behalf of Namibian students each day, we wouldn't be able to implement important programs like AGSP.

Thanks as well to the Forum for African Women Educationalists in Namibia for their work on the AGSP program. I'd also like to acknowledge our other AGSP implementing partner - the Evangelical Lutheran Church AIDS Program for its work to implement this program throughout Namibia.

And last, but not least, I think we all need to applaud Standard Bank's vital contribution to this program; for their willingness to support education in Namibia today, as well as in the future. (applause)

Standard Bank has also been an active partner with other United States sponsored programs. It was instrumental in the recently-launched Corporate Orphans Nutrition project where the bank joined Namibia Diaries and NABCOA in providing support for a food supplement initiative for orphans.

Standard Bank has also agreed to assist our local partner NGOs with financial management expertise and support to build internal organizational capacity.

In conclusion, we thank you again for your corporate leadership in all these areas and look forward to a very fruitful partnership in support of Namibia's promising learners.

Thank you.