

FINAL REMARKS

BY

HIV/AIDS Prevention Advisor, Ms. Mary Furnivall

Launch of Take Control's Relationships Campaign

May 14, 2007, 10:00AM, Parliament Gardens

Hon Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Minister of Information and Broadcasting,

Ms. Ella Shihepo, Director: DSP – Ministry of Health and Social Services,

Ms. Khin-Sandi Lwin, Country Representative – UNICEF,

Mr. Nahum Gorelick, Director – NawaLife Trust,

Take Control and its Partners,

Members of the Media ,

Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Core,

Distinguished Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with Honorable Minister Nandi-Ndaitwah and our Take Control Partners for today's launch of Take Control's innovative new HIV/AIDS awareness campaign. The campaign promises to reach all Namibians with messages on a universal subject -- strong, healthy relationships. Everyone wants and benefits from healthy relationships. This campaign will make a significant contribution to the fight against HIV/AIDS by promoting respect, responsibility, communication and support within relationships, and bring home the importance of HIV preventive behaviors.

The United States Government is pleased to support the "Relationships" campaign, as part of our ongoing assistance through NAWA Life to the "Take Control" campaign. For over seven years, USAID has worked closely with the Namibian Government, partners and stakeholders in an effort to stem the spread of HIV. Indeed, these partner

relationships and working to keep them strong and healthy, are central to effective HIV/AIDS strategies.

Under the President's Emergency Plan for HIV/AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the US Government has provided US\$124 million (\$N870M) since 2004 to assist Namibia's national HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment program. Because Namibia is using these resources well and is achieving significant results, we have again increased U.S. assistance in 2007 to US \$91 million or \$N 637 million.

Namibia has been recognized internationally for your success in providing infected Namibians with access to free, quality HIV *treatment*. Approximately 26,000 of the 52,000 people estimated to be in need are currently receiving treatment. Namibia is meeting 50% of the treatment needs of its people. This is a major accomplishment, and one of which you should be proud.

But to slow and ultimately stop the epidemic, it is imperative that we increase the focus on prevention -- what we can do to change behavior and interrupt transmission. Influencing other people's behavior is a difficult thing to do, but it is possible. Our vision as the United States Government is to work in close collaboration with the Namibian Government and our partners to support strategies and programs that effectively change behavior. These programs must deal directly with highly sensitive issues about sex, relationships, trust, abuse, and fear. We often do not feel comfortable talking about these issues, and less so in public, but for the sake of our families, and our children, we must.

We are very pleased that the emphasis of this campaign will be on improving attitudes towards safe behaviors by directly addressing these sensitive issues: faithfulness, delaying sexual activity, abstinence, HIV testing as couples, consistent, correct condom use, and respect and compassion for those already infected with HIV/AIDS. Equally important, the campaign will also encourage gender equality by promoting joint sexual decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution. The campaign will face head-on the painful issues of physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

We hope that this Take Control Relationships Campaign will have an impact on what research has shown is one of the main drivers of the epidemic in southern Africa, the high rate of long-term multiple and concurrent sexual relationships.

With today's launch, we see the impact of effective collaboration between the Governments of Namibia and the United States, and Namibian partners in HIV/AIDS prevention. The result is this innovative, yet practical, national media campaign. This new focus represents the next step to guarantee that all Namibians have access to accurate and compelling HIV prevention messages. It is vital that the project be given the high priority it deserves.

I thank you.