

MGECW's Standards for Residential Child Care Facilities Launch
Namibian Children's Home, Heliodoor Street, Eros
July 17, 2009

The Honorable Marlene Mungunda, Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare
Honorable Angelika Muharukua, Deputy Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare
Ms. Sirka Ausiku, Permanent Secretary of Gender Equality and Child Welfare
Distinguished guests from the Ministries of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Education and Health and Social Services
Residential Child Care Facility stakeholders
Representatives from the NGO and donor communities
Members of the media
Youth activists
Ladies and gentlemen

I am pleased to join you for the launch of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare's Standards for Residential Child Care Facilities, and honored to share a few remarks about Namibia's efforts in promoting the welfare of its most promising citizens, the children of Namibia.

As the world has focused on the growing number of orphans and vulnerable children in Africa, particularly due to HIV and AIDS, the Government of Namibia has established itself as a leader in meeting the needs of orphans and vulnerable children. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare: directs the nation's response to assist orphans and vulnerable children; coordinates the National Plan of Action; and provides vision, leadership, talent and resources.

I am pleased to note that Namibian government provides grants not only in support of children, but also in support of residential care for children. Currently, the Ministry of Gender Equity and Child Welfare provides over 100,000 maintenance grants in support of OVC.

Under the Ministry's management, residential child care facilities are an essential component of promoting child welfare in Namibia. With as many as thirty-six percent of children under eighteen not living with either of their biological parents, residential child care facilities fill a critical need. Namibia's rural population is disproportionately impacted, with the rate of children under eighteen not living with either of their biological parent as high as forty four percent.

I commend the Ministry of Gender Equality for developing standards for Residential Child Care Facilities in order to ensure orphans and vulnerable children are cared for, supported and protected with quality services. I also want to thank PACT, which is funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, for its strong partnership with the Ministry to produce these critical standards.

All over the world, countries are working on setting standards for care. Namibia is among the leaders in the world for establishing and endorsing clear, useful standards for residential care of children. Congratulations to all of you on this excellent effort!

At the 2009 HIV/AIDS Implementer's Conference, recently held in Windhoek, a number of the presenters spoke eloquently about the need to involve those who are infected by the disease in the design of their programs. I am very pleased to say that the Ministry included the children when it developed its standards, incorporating their voices, needs, priorities, and perspectives

The next step will be a challenge – ensuring that residential settings implement the guidelines you have set forth.

Therefore, I also congratulate the Ministry for partnering with NGOs and Residential Child Care Facilities to implement these standards. This partnership between will strengthen services for children in residential care. It is civil society, communities, and families who will ultimately have the greatest responsibility for the children in their care. My boss, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, has been known to say that “it takes a village to raise a child.” This has new meaning in the context of Namibia implementing these standards.

I also would like to offer my congratulations to the NGOs and Residential Child Care Facilities who have worked together to provide the highest quality of care for children in these settings. You are working together in dynamic new ways – joining forces and providing each other with peer support – and the incredible results of your partnership are evident in the children's care.

Residential care in Namibia is moving more and more towards a family-based system -- care in small groups, in community settings, with permanent caregivers and role models for the children. This is important for their development, and critical to their transition into healthy young adults who will become productive members of Namibian society.

Namibia will make this happen by implementing these new standards so that there will be uniform, quality service care for all orphans and vulnerable children. By doing so, caregivers and facility managers will improve the overall care for children who are in residential care settings.

To the Ministry staff, Residential Child Care Facility stakeholders, NGOs, youth, and implementers, I thank you for your work. We admire your courage, your determination and sense of responsibility towards the children of Namibia. Because of your collective efforts, the welfare of Namibia's orphans and vulnerable children are a national priority. You have earned and deserve a huge round of applause. Thank you.