



SPEECH BY HONORABLE MARLENE MUNGUNDA MINISTER OF
GENDER EQUALITY AND CHILD WELFARE ON THE LAUNCH OF
MINIMUM STANDARDS OF CARE FOR RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE
FACILITIES.

NAMIBIA CHILDREN HOME

17 JULY 2009

Her Excellency Dennise Mathieu, Ambassador of the United States of America to Namibia

Honorable Dep. Minister of MGECW Angerika Muharukua

Dr Stephanie Posner , Chief of Party Pact Namibia

Ms. Sirkka Ausiku, the Permanent Secretary of the MGECW

Dr. Henry Platt- Director of CAFO

All Managers and staff of Residential Child Care Facilities

Distinguished, Ladies and Gentlemen

Members of the Media

Dear Boys and Girls

We are here today to officially launch the Minimum Standards for Residential Child Care Facilities in Namibia. At the outset, I would like to congratulate United States Government PEPFAR through Pact for working closely with my Ministry in developing these standards. The standards will help us not only to establish and manage high quality care services for children in Namibia but also suggest actions to be taken when registering and monitoring the Residential Child Care Facilities.

The Minimum Standards for Residential Child Care Facilities (RCCF) that are contained in the booklet is the result of a participatory and consultative process and Child Participation was integrated into the design in all stages of RCCF standards development.

Currently Namibia is experiencing a growing number of children grieving for dying or dead parents, stigmatized by society through association with HIV & AIDS and then plunged into economic crisis and insecurity by their parents' deaths. Orphans and Vulnerable Children have access to limited services and resources in our communities and hence only add to the difficulties faced by these children. As the number of OVCs rises, the risk increases that these children will not be able to realize their rights and be supported-economically and emotionally through their trauma.

In response to this, the Namibian Government has placed high priority on the well being of its children and youth. With the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare in 2005, all Child Welfare Functions were transferred from the Ministry of Health and Social Services to my Ministry.

The Cabinet also transferred the custody and administration of the Children's Act 33 of 1960, in terms of which all child welfare functions

are regulated, including Children's Homes and Places of Safety. Therefore, the Ministry is responsible for attending to children in need of care or protection, and for removing them from the abused home environment and place them in alternative care where necessary.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare from its National Policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children developed a National Plan of Action for OVC. Even though, the Namibian National Plan of Action sets out a strategy towards more community based support of children and families in need, part of the activities is to ensure that the special protection and rights of the Namibian Children who are placed and cared for in residential child care settings is upheld at all times.

More than 1000 children are placed in non registered and registered child care facilities out of a need for places of safety. Residential Child Care Facilities are mushrooming without notifying my Ministry and low quality care and abuse of vulnerable children cannot be controlled. It is the role of Government, through the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, to ensure the supervision of the safety, wellbeing and development of any child found in need of care and placed in alternative care with competent and duly authorized civil society organizations. In terms of the Children's Act 33 of 1960, this means that no person or association of persons is allowed to just take in children

and care for them without being registered with my Ministry. Doing so is against the law.

Government has observed with great concern that when a child has been left orphaned or the parents or extended family members are unable to care for their children due to weakened socio-economic circumstances, people think that the solution is to build large institutions and to put these children there.

The removal of a child from the care of the family should be seen as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible time. Financial and material poverty alone or conditions directly linked to such poverty should never be a justification for removing a child from parental care, or preventing his/her re-integration with the family, but must be seen as a sign for the need to provide appropriate support to the families.

Ensuring that families have access to necessary forms of support in their care giving role is the responsibility of Government complemented by civil society and all citizens at large. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare provides grants to OVC themselves and to families caring for OVC. Coverage of these grants has increased enormously in recent years with the increase of children on the grant system from 9000 in 2004 to 105 136 in June 2009.

The ministry is also appointing Community Child Care Workers at constituency level to provide psychosocial support, activate communities, refer cases to social workers and register children for social grants.

As you are gathered here to witness the launch of the Minimum Standards of Residential Child Care Facilities, I want you to keep in mind that the family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, wellbeing and protection of children. All efforts must primarily be directed to enable the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents or when appropriate to other close relatives.

As a nation we need to start fostering children in our own family set ups or where appropriate, adopt children to give them a sense of love and security. In instances where this may not be possible, the drive should be for smaller, more local residential care settings that are embedded in communities and which minimize the physical and social separation of children from their communities as opposed to larger institutions. Our nation needs small family type group homes in the community with house parents from the regions themselves.

I must however, express my Ministry's appreciation and thanks to all managers, principals and caregivers of Residential Child Care Facilities for your selfless commitment to the plight of the orphans and vulnerable children of Namibia. You are not only providing shelter to these children, but the much needed love, care and protection. Most of these children, who are traumatized through the loss of, or separation from their parents and relatives, have suffered all types of abuse and neglect. At the moment consultations on Child Care and Protection Bill is in the process and this will replace the old Act (Act 33 of 1960.) This Bill provides key topics such as facilities for the care of children, child protection register, child trafficking, prevention and early intervention services, adoption, age of majority, children's court. The main objective of the consultations is to get input to the CCPB from a many people as possible and I encourage you to participate in these meetings.

The Minimum Standards for Residential Child Care Facilities are divided in five chapters and focus on organizational issues, management & staffing, premises, administration and finance and caring for children. I challenge you to conform to the Minimum Standards and perform a valuable role in providing the 'last resort' in a continuum of care for children. I also urge our development partners to conduct a further

assessment on the possibility of developing special places in family type residential facilities or formal foster care programmes for children and young people with special needs.

With these words, I would like to thank everybody who was involved in the development of the standards and declare the standards officially launched.

I thank you.