

**Remarks by Ambassador McGuire
Launching of the Mobile Training Unit
November 30, 18:30 p.m.; Parliament Gardens**

Thank you, Master of Ceremonies, Secretary Moses Ndjarakana --

Chairman of the National Council, Kandi Nehova; Minister of Regional and Local Government and Housing, Nickey Iyambo; Other Ministers; Members of Parliament; Regional Governors; Regional and Local Counselors; Members of the Diplomatic Corps; Distinguished Guests

It is a great pleasure to be here today, just over a week since I presented my credentials to President Nujoma, and thus assumed my responsibilities as U.S. Ambassador to Namibia.

I have heard from a number of sources that Namibia's Parliament is emerging as a model for the African continent – the vision represented by the Mobile Training Unit exemplifies an innovative spirit and exceptional dedication to citizen outreach for which you can be proud.

Chairman Nehova, the MTU is an important manifestation of your commitment to building the capacity for decentralization, but as well, for the fact you have embraced information technology as a tool for accelerating that process.

Namibia is clearly on its way to becoming part of the global telecommunications revolution – the MTU is a visible example of how affordable digital technology can bring civic education and participatory democracy to its most rural citizens.

The MTU, with its complement of trainers, computers and external and internal projection system, will take both prepared digital presentations and live web-based events directly to those in Namibia that don't have computer and Internet access.

While at a basic level the MTU will serve as a formal training platform for officials and civic representatives, at a perhaps more significant level the MTU will incorporate rural Namibians into the global community, serve as a tool for decentralizing governmental decision making, and ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to participate in local, regional and national debate on development.

How the Parliament chooses to make use of this vital constituent input will of course be your challenge and will be a vital determinant of the success of the MTU and of the Parliament itself.

I would like to congratulate others who were involved with the Chairman in this effort.

Let me begin with Mr. Foster Mijiga (*mih-JIG-uh*) of NDI – the MTU is his brainchild based on his experience with the logistical difficulties of providing such training in rural South Africa, and his vision of how a single unit with satellite uplink could efficiently deliver civic education even in the most remote sites.

I would also like to recognize the pioneering spirit of the IT Department, a private Namibia firm which has provided a great deal of technical support and which will provide bandwidth to the MTU, as well as two American companies, Compaq HP and Microsoft, and their local vendors, for their important contributions.

Minister Iyambo, you and your ministry are also to be commended, as I understand that through your support, the regions and local authorities are acquiring communications infrastructure to connect with Parliament, government ministries, as well as local and international partners, and which will be useful in accelerating the process of decentralization, and improving the quality of the effort.

It is gratifying to witness such a productive partnership between the legislative and executive branches of government, joined together with such committed and forward-thinking representatives of the private sector.

As the Mobile Training Unit sets out for its initial visits to each of the 13 regions, my Embassy shares in your excitement -- we will be following your progress closely, and will look forward to reporting widely on your experience and accomplishments.

Thank you.