

Remarks by U.S. Government Representative  
Gary Newton, USAID/Namibia Mission Director  
Launch of *Nawa Life*  
Wednesday, 27 September 2006  
Okahandja Park, Katutura

- Right Honorable Mr. Nahas Angula, Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia
- Mr. Nahum Gorelick, Director, Nawa Life Trust
- Members of Community Action Forums
- Invited guests
- Members of the media
- Ladies and gentlemen

It's a pleasure to be able to join the Right Honorable Prime Minister and all of you here today at Okahandja Park to celebrate the launching of a new Namibian organization. The Namibian field office of the US-based Johns Hopkins University Health Communication Partnership has been registered as a local NGO under the name of Nawa Life Trust. Under the name Nawa Life Trust they will continue to assist communities nationwide to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The *Nawa Life Trust* grew out of the Johns Hopkins University Health Communications Partnership which is funded by USAID under the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

We enthusiastically support this transition from a donor-funded *project* to a Namibian organization that can compete and account for direct donor support.

Under the Emergency Plan, the U.S. Government intends to move steadily towards direct funding of Namibian organizations. Our goal is to incrementally reduce reliance on U.S. intermediary organizations as managerial and technical capacity is strengthened in Namibian organizations, especially the capacity to comply with donors' financial management and accounting requirements.

Nawa Life Trust will continue to play an important part in the nation's response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. They have expertise and capacity in a number of critical areas:

- design and implementation of HIV/AIDS behavior change programs;
- development of HIV/AIDS information, education and communication materials;
- mobilizing communities to identify and solve local problems using local solutions; and,
- providing technical assistance in the development of mass media campaigns.

With these capacities, Nawa Life Trust will play a lead role in slowing the spread of HIV/AIDS by preventing new infections. Working in collaboration with their many

Government and NGO partners, Nawa Life is well equipped and positioned to help improve the effectiveness of the national HIV/AIDS *prevention* program.

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 of treatment are currently receiving treatment. Namibia is meeting 50% of the treatment needs of its people. This is a major accomplishment.

Given the talent, commitment and resources you have here, we fully expect that Namibia will soon be recognized for your success at HIV/AIDS *prevention*.

But, to slow and ultimately stop the epidemic, it is imperative that we improve our understanding of how HIV/AIDS is being transmitted, what we can do to interrupt transmission, and whether interventions are effective in changing behavior.

Identifying the best interventions means asking ourselves difficult questions and addressing sensitive issues, for example:

- Do parents feel comfortable discussing sex with their children to educate them on HIV prevention? Do young people then feel able to avoid sex until they are ready?
- Have we done all we can to ensure that schools and hostels are safe environments for our children, and that our children have knowledgeable and trustworthy adults they can talk to when they need advice or help?
- Have we done enough to prevent HIV infection among teachers and health care workers and others providing critical services to the community?
- Are we doing enough in our communities to address the relationship between alcohol and HIV infection? Are there programs available for people who need help to stop drinking?
- Have we made sure that condoms are accessible and affordable to people at risk of HIV infection, and have we ensured they know how to use them properly?
- Are there user-friendly systems in place which allow abused women to seek legal protection and recourse?
- Are we doing enough to fight stigma and discrimination so that more HIV-positive Namibians feel comfortable talking about their status and empowered to participate in prevention programs?

Frankly, we do not have enough Namibia-specific research and information on which to base prevention interventions that are as focused and effective as they could be.

Research shows that one of the main drivers of the epidemic in southern Africa is the high rate of long-term “overlapping” sexual relationships. We assume this is what is also driving the epidemic in Namibia, but we do not know for certain.

Research has shown that the majority of Namibians have heard of HIV and know of ways to prevent infection. But we must accelerate efforts to help people bridge the gap between possessing *knowledge* of protective behaviors and actually *practicing* those behaviors. We do not have enough information on interventions that lead to behavior change – *in Namibia*.

Experience has shown that political leadership is key in the fight against AIDS. Political leaders can act as role models and demonstrate the importance that they personally place on preventing the spread of AIDS in Namibia.

As the costs of care and treatment continue to increase, it is imperative that we spend our prevention dollars wisely to protect those at greatest risk with program interventions of proven effectiveness.

We expect Nawa Life will play a prominent part in the priority effort to make Namibia's national *prevention* program as effective and successful as your national *treatment* program.

In closing let me point out that Nawa Life is one of several programs and organizations supported by the U.S. Under the President's Emergency Plan, we have 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 expect another increase in U.S. assistance in 2007 to between US \$76 and \$84 million – or N\$523- N\$588 million.

On behalf of the US Government and the Emergency Plan Team here in Namibia, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to the staff of the Health Communications Partnership at Johns Hopkins University for the excellent work you have done. Thank you also to the Government of the Republic of Namibia and the Right Honorable Nahas Angula for your leadership and commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Long live Nawa Life!

Thank you.