

Remarks by Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Murphy  
16 Days of Activism to Stop Violence Against Women and Children  
Boot Camp at Old Naledi Grounds  
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*As prepared for delivery*

Acknowledgements

- Kgosi Charles Kooitsetswe
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- District Commissioner Ms. Seitshiro
- Director Women's Affairs Department, Mrs Valencia Mogegeh
- Men Sector Coordinator, Ms Allah Moyo
- Women's Sector Coordinator, Ms Matshidiso Thathana
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Remarks

It is an honor and a pleasure to address you today on behalf of the U.S. Embassy and Ambassador Michelle Gavin. She would really have liked to be here, but she is participating in a previously scheduled event. She asked me to convey to you her strong support for your efforts to address gender based violence.

I would like to thank Women's Affairs Department and the planning committee for inviting the U.S. Government to partner with it in the fight against gender based violence in Botswana and for giving us the opportunity to speak to you this morning. We are committed partners in this important effort.

Today's event is part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence campaign. It is a particularly important part of this campaign because

it is one of the few activities led by the Men's Sector and focused on engaging with men and families on this important issue.

The theme of this year's campaign, as we all know, is "From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's End Violence Against Women and Children."

Therefore, to fathers, to husbands, and to male partners – let me say this: you need to play an active role to help us achieve peace in the home.

Gender based violence is a cross cutting and complex phenomenon that both reflects and reinforces inequalities between men and women. It also compromises the health, dignity, security, and autonomy of its victims.

According to the study published earlier this year by Gender Links for Equality and Justice and by the Women's Affairs Department, over two thirds of women in Botswana have experienced some form of gender violence in their lifetime. This is a shocking number given the population size of this country. The same study shows that, nearly half of men admit to perpetrating violence against women. That is why we it is so important that you, the men of Botswana, here today and engaged on this issue.

The gender based violence the challenge here is immense. Official police statistics for 2010 indicate that there were:

- 8 cases of incest;
- 518 cases of defilement of girls under the age of 16;
- 1,865 cases of rape; and,
- 1,166 threats to kill that year.

And, as you all know, since many victims are either afraid to report gender based violence to the authorities, or do not know where to go when they become victims, these statistics do not reflect the full scale of the problem. In some cases, women and children may be virtual hostages to abusive figures in their lives.

What is the real impact of gender based violence? It prevents women from reaching their full potential due to ongoing psychological effects: depression, low self-esteem, fear for personal safety, and simple shame. It is important to note that women who experience gender based violence are also 50% more likely to be infected with HIV than women in non-violent relationships. According to a UN report, 53% of women in Botswana had unprotected sex because their partners refused to use condoms. This makes women more vulnerable to HIV, and it is clearly a concern given the HIV prevalence in this country.

We all know that abusive behaviors can be referred to as cultural practices. These include arranged marriages for girls who are below 18, scolding and verbally abusing wives, polygamy, structural exclusion of women from decision making, and treating them as children. We all respect and cherish our cultures. They are part of our identity and serve as a symbol of unity, but culture is not, and never has been, immutable. We all need to reflect and discourage practices that put our daughters, nieces, mothers, aunts and wives at risk of abuse.

We need to ask ourselves what it means to be a true man. The answer is simple when it comes to gender based violence. **Monna tota o sireletsa mosadi le**

**bana** (A true man protects women and children). We cannot sit back and watch gender base violence unfold without taking action.

The situation calls for a collaborative response – from government, from communities and local leaders, from civil society organizations, from the private sector, and from development partners – all must work together and explore best ways to put a stop to gender based violence. I am pleased to see so many representatives from these stakeholders participating in this boot camp.

Women and girls constitute 50% of the population in Botswana. They are politicians, leaders, decision-makers, producers, workers, professionals, entrepreneurs, and service providers. Their contributions are vital to the well-being of families, communities, and your local and national economy. All these things will suffer irreparable damage and harm if we fail to protect women and girls from gender based violence.

Although the Domestic Violence Law was a step forward, women are still reluctant to report gender based violence for a variety of reasons—this is one area where we can collaborate as stakeholders. We can promote and support implementation of this law. We should facilitate mobilization to educate communities about gender based violence, its effects on society and the need to report cases. We should strengthen referral systems for gender based violence. We should equip the relevant officials with the necessary skills to identify and assist victims of gender based violence, particularly within the health, law enforcement and judicial systems. And, we should establish support systems for victims. And, not just formal support systems, like shelters.

We must establish informal support systems within our communities and families. Victims of gender based violence should not be ostracized because they report their crimes, or pressured to “let it go” because the perpetrator is a prominent member of the community or respected family member. When young girls reports a case of defilement by a relative to the police, our response to the must never be, “how could you put your uncle in prison like that?” It must always be, “what he did to you was wrong; it was a crime; and, he must be punished.”

The U.S. Embassy is intensely engaged on the issue of gender based violence, both within our mission family and with Botswana society at large. We conducted a survey among the entire Embassy staff to gauge our own individual awareness of gender based violence and how to address it – and we used those results to tailor our plans for a Mission-wide Wellness Day later this month to include efforts to raise awareness among staff members.

We have partnered with Gender Links, Stepping Stones International, and the YWCA to conduct a variety of activities including workshops, focus group discussions, and broader community dialogues with youth and adults across the country to raise the awareness of GBV in Botswana. We are training peer educators and supporting the dissemination of an important study of GBV in Botswana that details its widespread and harmful impact across society.

We are particularly pleased to have joined forces with the BDF, leveraging that institution’s unique ability to address men in Botswana with the message that there is never a place for violence against women or children. Working with

Stepping Stones and the BDF, we are supporting participation in the official program of events on November 29 in Good Hope.

Finally, we are conducting also an extensive social media campaign highlighting the issue of GBV throughout the 16 Days of activism. I encourage you all to “like” us and to participate in our social media dialogue.

The issue of gender based violence is a priority at the U.S. Embassy, and we could not be more pleased to be working so closely and effectively with the Government and people of Botswana to address this challenge. As for the program for today, I encourage you all take the fullest advantage of this opportunity to hear from and to share with others successes and failures – and why they were successes or failures – **because that is how we move forward – learning from each other, and supporting each other.**

The U.S Embassy is proud of its strong partnership with the Government and people of Botswana in many areas, and we look forward to continuing our close work with the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs to support the Botswana’s gender activities.

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