

Ambassador Michelle D. Gavin
Gender Based Violence Roundtable
Tuesday, March 20, 2012
MOWANA SAFARI LODGE, KASANE

As prepared for delivery

- It is a tremendous pleasure to join you today to participate in this important discussion on gender-based violence, and I am particularly pleased that the U.S. Mission was able to support this event.
- Today's roundtable discussion is a continuation of the activities we began last year when we commemorated the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence."
- The theme for the 16 days was "From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's End Violence Against Women and Children."
- And we all know that it takes a lot more than focusing on this issue for 16 days to end that violence.
- It takes deliberate effort – each and every day.
- Botswana is rightly known for its history of peace, in a region where many countries have suffered war and political violence.
- This is a country committed to the rule of law and mindful of the importance of treating all people with dignity and respect.
- It is a place where the basic human decency of the population is undeniable. This is a story for which all Botswana should be proud.
- But there is another story – and that is what we are here to discuss – because no problem can be solved with silence.
- Today in Botswana, the frequency with which women are beaten and raped, and the frequency with which children are brutalized or exploited should shock us – and it should shake us into action.
- There is nothing more destructive or disempowering for women than physical and sexual violence inflicted upon them, often by the most trusted people in their lives. And the scar left on exploited children can never truly be erased.
- Obviously, these things are wrong at the deepest human level, but moreover, physical and sexual violence prevents women and children from reaching their full potential due to depression, low self-esteem, fear for personal safety, and simple shame.
- It is also 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.
- The official police statistics in Botswana for 2010 are staggering:
 - 518 cases of defilement of girls under the age of 16;
 - 1,865 cases of rape; and,
 - 1,166 threats to kill.

- Gender-based violence often goes un-reported and its victims usually lack the power or knowledge to speak up or hold the perpetrators accountable.
- Every day in Botswana, on average four women report a rape.
- Of rape offenders who are actually arrested and charged, only one quarter are convicted.
- I was told in November last year that in Pandamatenga – an average of two cases of defilement are reported every week.
- I say again – this should shock us – and it should shake us into action.
- These are crimes – not unfortunate family business, not messy personal relationships – crimes.
- Gender-based violence in Botswana presents a major hurdle to the advancement of this society – and it will remain so until we act to stop it.
- That means collaboration among Government, communities, civil society organizations, the private sector, and development partners such as the U.S. to work together and commit to stopping gender-based violence.
- Communities and government and schools must openly address the issues, educating young and old alike that gender-based violence will not be tolerated in today's Botswana.
- Victims of abuse or violence must be embraced and encouraged to report incidents – this means an effective referral system and responsive, knowledgeable, and empathetic officials.
- And the legal system must follow-through with enforcement and penalties that punish violators and effectively deter others.
- I have been in Botswana less than a year, but I have seen the important work that the U.S. Government has done in this area, and I am proud that we are continuing and expanding our partnership with the Government and people of Botswana.
- Our engagement in addressing gender violence is growing.
- Peace Corps Volunteers across the country are working effectively with organizations like Women Against Rape in Maun and The Women's Shelter in Molepolole to build the capacity to respond.
- We are working with Stepping Stones International in Mochudi in a program to support survivors of gender-based violence and to strengthen adolescent girls' empowerment
- The program will also address the harmful attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate gender based violence against women and girls.
- We are supporting a five-year project to improve the livelihoods of households of vulnerable adolescents especially girls and women.
- The U.S is also funding a civil society strengthening project to build the capacity of NGOs to design gender sensitive programs.
- The Government of Botswana and civil society are also wrestling with the issue.
- I know that the Women's Affairs Department, the Botswana Police Service, and local governments are particularly engaged in meeting this challenge – and I commend you all for these efforts.
- But we cannot rest.

- Bringing together the people in this room is a good step – but it is only one step in a long journey.
- I challenge us all to use this workshop effectively – to identify specific actions to be carried out by specific people within a specific timeframe that will have a specific impact on addressing the scourge of gender violence.
- If there is no action and no accountability – then we’re just talking.
- I said earlier that no problem can be solved with silence – neither can it be solved with just talking.
- Let us all be challenged today and tomorrow to establish an action plan:
- That energizes tribal authorities to address gender violence from a cultural and customary law perspective;
- That motivates local authorities to confront gender violence in the Kgotla context, and to work with law enforcement officials to ensure cases are dealt with, and to support and reward community activists who are working against gender violence;
- An action plan:
- That obtains the commitment of the Department of Social Services to conduct gender violence training, and to identify specific responsibilities for DSS officials with regard to gender violence;
- That calls on law enforcement and justice sector officials to pursue gender violence cases with the aggressiveness they deserve;
- An action plan:
- That calls on the Ministry of Education to train teachers to identify gender violence or exploitation against children and to take the necessary steps to bring in law enforcement;
- That enlists the support of the Ministry of Health to train its service providers in the same way – to identify gender violence and to know how to bring in law enforcement; and
- Simply put, an action plan:
- That maximizes the efforts and abilities of the wide range of organizations engaged in this effort – Government, civil society, law enforcement, justice sector, and development partners.
- Together – we can put an end to a shameful stain on this beautiful country’s social fabric.
- Let us begin to build together the knowledge and support and legal foundation that can ensure that women and children in Botswana are cherished and protected – as they should be.

THANK YOU