

Remarks by Ambassador Michelle D. Gavin
Completion Ceremony for Old Palapye Church Stabilization Project
Old Palapye Monument
July 8, 2011

As prepared for delivery

- The Minister of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism, Honorable Kitso Mokaila
- Dikgosi
- Member of Parliament for Tswapong North, Honorable Prince Maele
- Government Officials
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Dumelang, bomma le borra (Pause)

Le tsogile jang (Pause)

It is a great pleasure and honor to join you today for the ceremony to commemorate the completion of the stabilization project for the Old Palapye Church here at the former capital of the Bangwato people.

Situated alongside the Tswapong Hills, Old Palapye was the capital for the Bangwato for just 13 years, but its importance to the 300,000 residents here at the time, and its role as one of Botswana's first agriculturally-based towns is unquestioned.

I am particularly proud that the United States Government has been able to support the preservation of the key historical remnant for the site, the London Missionary Society Church.

Since 2001, the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation has supported nearly 600 projects and invested over 20 million dollars to preserve cultural sites, cultural objects and collections, and forms of traditional cultural expression in more than 100 countries around the world.

Now in its 10th year, the Ambassador's Fund is highly competitive and selects only the most deserving and vital projects to support.

We have a good record in working with the Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery.

In 2001, the United States funded a workshop to assist in preserving rock art at the Tsodilo World Heritage Site and later in 2003, we provided another grant to purchase equipment and software, to hire an expert on the management and conservation, and to train heritage managers on rock art conservation at the Tsodilo site.

The U.S. Embassy in Gaborone was proud to support these projects because we believe that the preservation of cultural heritage offers a unique opportunity for the people of the United States to connect and partner with the people of Botswana.

Founding President of Botswana Sir Seretse Khama said that “a nation without a past is a lost nation, and a people without a past is a people without a soul.”

I know that a great deal of thought and scholarship has gone into analyzing his statement.

I think it is fair to say that he believed that Botswana’s bright future depends upon the sense of social cohesion, national pride, and civic responsibility that come with understanding of, and respect for, Botswana’s past.

Mr. Minister, I would like to commend the work of your Ministry and in particular the National Museum and Monuments staff in advancing this project and many others around the country designed to preserve and protect Botswana’s artifacts, sites, and cultural traditions.

This is important work.

Beyond the simple aspect of preservation, these projects also add an element of sustainable economic benefit and, if properly preserved, protected, and managed, they can be a robust source of livelihood.

I know here at this site, the plan is to use this magnificent structure as a cornerstone to attract tourists interested in the area’s unique cultural and historical significance.

There is also another reason I am so pleased to participate in this event today.

The United States support for this project is symbolic of the kind of partnership that we enjoy with Botswana more broadly.

This is something I have already said publicly several times since arriving in Botswana less than one month ago – and it is something I will continue to say often.

The United States considers our partnership with Botswana to be critically important, not just to our two countries, but across the region and continent.

We view it as the model of what a mature partnership with an African democracy can look like – one based on shared interests and mutual respect.

We are close partners in many areas – from assisting with the response to Botswana’s gravest challenge – HIV/AIDS – to working together to train law enforcement officials from 34 African nations at the International

Law Enforcement Academy – to protecting the country’s pristine and vital natural resources – to providing grass roots assistance in rural villages with our Peace Corps Volunteers.

The list is long because this is a partnership that works. And I am personally committed, and my Embassy is committed, to nurturing this partnership and making it even stronger.

At the risk of stretching a metaphor too far, as diplomats and government officials, we use different tools to strengthen a partnership than the engineers and technicians used to preserve this historic building – but our objectives are not so different.

We preserve and strengthen the current structure in order to ensure that it remains solid and provides for new and expanded opportunities ahead.

That is what the United States is in Botswana for – to build on the successful partnership we have already established, and to set our course for even greater opportunities in the future.

In closing, please let me just say again how honored I am to be with you today, and how proud I am, as a representative of the American people, that my government was able to support the preservation of this historic building.

Thank you.