

Remarks
Ambassador Michelle D. Gavin
Childline Botswana – Dining Hall Dedication Ceremony
Friday, November 18, 2011

As Prepared for Delivery

Remarks

- It is a tremendous pleasure and a great honor to join you today for this important event.
- I am pleased to be here and to participate in this dedication ceremony for two reasons – both of which I feel very strongly about.
- I am proud that the United States Government was able to support the construction of this new dining hall because this facility expands the ability of Childline Botswana to reach out to and nurture vulnerable youth in the community, to touch those young lives, and to make a difference that can last a lifetime.
- Secondly, this building and the support offered by the people of the United States demonstrate something much broader but equally important – and that is the strength and depth of the overall U.S. – Botswana partnership.
- Regarding Childline and its work in the community, I arrived in Botswana just about five months ago, and I have had the opportunity to learn quite a lot in that short time about the challenges that Botswana’s youth face.
- I have also had the chance to learn about and see firsthand the work of Childline Botswana.
- When Doreen Khama and Fay Smith determined back in 1990 to act on the growing need to protect children from abuse and to give them the tools they need to protect themselves, they broke new ground.
- I salute those brave women, and the dedicated individuals that have followed them in building an organization that has had a real impact on stopping in Botswana what is a blight on any society – the abuse of children.
- Childline’s vision is simple, but profound – a nation that is child safe and child friendly.
- Its innovative approach to assisting adolescent orphans and vulnerable children in taking charge and finding direction in their lives is truly inspiring.
- Over the years, Childline has dealt with – in sensitive but effective ways – more than 6500 child abuse cases.
- It has rightly gained the reputation as Botswana’s lead agency in addressing children’s rights.
- I am extremely proud that the United States Government – through the Department of Defense – was able to stand with Childline Botswana in its mission to protect children.

- With the construction of this dining hall, children who are vulnerable or abused or impacted by HIV/AIDS now have one less worry – a warm meal.
- Completed last year at a cost of more than two million pula, this facility clearly demonstrates the power of partnership to make a difference in people’s lives, and I could not be more proud to participate in dedicating this building today.
- But more broadly, this dining hall demonstrates something else important to both our nations.
- It is emblematic of deep and strong partnership between our two countries – one based on mutual respect and shared interests.
- I spent the first two years of President Obama's term working at the White House as the President’s senior advisor on Africa and I gave a lot of thought to the big picture of what the United States should be trying to achieve in the region.
- I had the opportunity to discuss our strategic vision with the President many times and I committed myself to this vision when I became Ambassador to Botswana.
- Botswana is the place where the United States should be modeling what a mature partnership with an African democracy looks like.
- This is a partnership that can be held high, and of which we can say to other countries – that is what we’re aiming for – that is what a modern and mature partnership looks like.
- So, on one important level, this building supports the vital work of Childline Botswana, sheltering and feeding children in need.
- On a very different level however, it says something more: We are partners, committed to working together to build for all Botswana a brighter future.
- I would like to close by acknowledging the important work of all those that made this building a reality. In particular, I would like to thank the architect, Rabasha Sampson, and the builders RIMU Enterprises.
- I would also like to thank those people that keep this center running and deliver the vital services to children in need. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Managing Director, Mrs. Onkemetse Montsheki, the care-givers, and the guidance counselors, that give their time and talent to the mission of Childline Botswana and to nation safer and friendlier to its children.
- Thank you.