

Remarks by Ambassador Michelle D. Gavin
GBV Press Event
CDC
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As prepared for delivery

- 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.
- 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 – we know that they don't tell the whole story because so often these crimes go unreported.
 - 518 cases of defilement of girls under the age of 16;
 - 1,865 cases of rape; and,
 - 1,166 threats to kill.
- I say again – this should shock us – and it should shake us into action.
- In addressing this challenge, the U.S. Embassy is committed to standing as a strong partner with the people and the Government of Botswana.
- While it is imperative for every one of us, each day of the year, to face up to these realities and work to build the kind of future we want to see, the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, which starts in just a few days, is the perfect opportunity intensify our engagement – and that we have done.
- 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, training of peer educators, and broad dissemination of an important study of GBV in Botswana and its widespread and harmful impact across society.
- We are particularly pleased to have joined forces with the BDF as well, 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.
- We also will conduct an extensive social media campaign highlighting the issue of GBV throughout the 16 Days of activism.
- I would particularly like to commend the efforts by the Women's Affairs Department in the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs for the extensive efforts in which they are engaged during this 16 Days campaign and beyond.
- I also want to note that the United States Government is supporting a variety of programs that are working each and every day to combat this terrible problem, including projects with Project Concern International and Research Triangle Institute and their local NGO partners.
- In addition, our partnership with the Botswana Police Service that operates the International Law Enforcement Academy in Otse runs two courses a year training Botswana police along with law enforcement officers from across Africa in investigating and prosecuting GBV cases.
- I want to highlight also that coming up during this 16 Days campaign is another important – and related – day. That is World AIDS Day on December 1.
- As you know, the United States' partnership with Botswana in fighting HIV/AIDS is longstanding and committed, and our theme for this year's World AIDS Day – Getting to Zero Together – signifies that commitment and partnership.
- So, let me conclude with the simple notion that violence and abuse against women and children are more than crimes – they can stop a great nation in its tracks. And with partners like these with me here today, and with strong-minded men and women across Botswana, this stain on Botswana's national fabric can indeed be erased.
- I would now like to invite General Gaborone to offer remarks.