

**Remarks by Ambassador Michelle D. Gavin
Graduation Ceremony
John Mackenzie High School, Francistown
October 4, 2012**

As prepared for delivery

- It is a tremendous pleasure to join you all for this very important day.
- I have to confess, I start most speeches in much the same way – saying what a tremendous pleasure it is to be here. That’s because I mean it.
- As you can imagine, I speak to a lot of groups. Whether it is launching a new health clinic, speaking to media professionals about press freedom, addressing regional leaders about cross-border conservation efforts, talking to local leaders about the scourge of gender based violence, or addressing senior Botswana Government officials and private sector leaders at the United States’ Independence Day celebration, I really and truly enjoy talking about what matters to America in Botswana.
- The same is true today. I was so very pleased to be invited to speak to you – on perhaps one of the most important days in your young lives – because you matter to America.
- And my bosses – the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, and our Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton – have made this crystal clear to me. –You matter!
- Secretary Clinton said about a month ago, on International Youth Day, “I have seen young people driving innovations and economic and social entrepreneurship in every region of the world. I believe the best solutions to our shared challenges will come from harnessing the energy and creativity of youth.”
- What Secretary Clinton is talking about is our shared global future – and like a typical American, because we are fundamentally optimistic people, she envisions a brighter future, driven by new ideas, innovation, imagination, economic growth and diversification, civic engagement and political stability, by discoveries that conquer health challenges and practices that protect the environment that supports and sustains us all.
- And she is talking about young people driving that change, building that future. There really is no other option.
- Before I came to Botswana, I worked in the White House as President Obama’s senior advisor on Africa.
- There, I had the great pleasure of organizing – at the President’s request – a variety of activities centered on Africa’s youth.
- One of those was the President’s Forum for Young African Leaders, to which just about every African country, including Botswana, sent a couple of its most promising young people.

- One of the best days of my professional life was the day President Obama spoke to this group in the East Room at the White House, acknowledging the tired old stereotype of Africa as an undifferentiated morass of conflict and tragedy and need. And he told the young people in the room, and I am quoting his words then “You represent a different vision, a vision of Africa on the move – an Africa that’s ending old conflicts. . . . an Africa that’s modernizing and creating opportunities – agribusiness in Tanzania, prosperity in Botswana, political progress in Ghana and Guinea; an Africa that’s pursuing a broadband revolution that could transform the daily lives of future generations.”
- He was not talking to Presidents or Prime Ministers or wealthy businessmen – he was talking to young people, not much older than you, when he said: you represent a different vision – you represent an Africa on the move.
- I am not here to make a long speech, but if you take away just two words today, let them be – you matter!
- At our Embassy, this is not just us talking the talk about youth outreach and empowerment – we also walk the walk.
- You matter – you are the architects of our shared future, and just like Headmaster Lambat and the teachers and staff here at John Mackenzie, we want to make sure that we do all we possibly can to give you the tools you need to make a difference – to lead healthy, productive, safe, secure, and confident lives – so that you can indeed build that brighter future, and even beyond, so that you can set the example for the generation that will follow you.
- The U.S. Government is involved in a lot of activities aimed at precisely that objective.
- One program we just began this year is called the Ambassador’s Leaders of Tomorrow. In this program, we select a very few outstanding young people from around the country who have already demonstrated leadership success, and we bring them to Gaborone for a series of meetings and workshops to further develop their leadership skills and expose them to parts of government and civil society that will benefit them as they continue to grow as leaders.
- We have just initiated this project, and those chosen to participate are indeed a select few. I am very proud to say that two of the first group of participants are from right here at John Mackenzie –
 - Akosua Boadi-Agyemang
 - Gape Mokoka
- Congratulations to you both and to your school. Very well done.
- And the truth is, I cannot think of a better example that highlights our focus and our interest in Botswana’s youth than the work of one of your very own – Peace Corps Volunteer Michael Krause.
- I have been around a lot of Volunteers, and believe me, they are all incredibly dedicated, but Michael is special. He is serving in his fourth year as a Volunteer, an honor reserved for very

few. He did outstanding work at the Mother Theresa Center, working with orphans and vulnerable children, and you all know well what he has meant to John Mackenzie.

- Michael clearly brings a commitment and drive that has changed people's lives – and there is no better calling or better gift.
- So, please join me in thanking Michael for his selfless efforts here in Botswana. <Applause>
- Soon after I arrived in Botswana a little over a year ago, we determined that as a Mission, we would expand our already substantial activity with youth. The first thing we did was not to do more – but to listen more.
- We undertook a series of focus groups all around the country to learn more about what youth in Botswana themselves said they need – and to learn about what they hope to achieve.
- Much of what we learned did not surprise us – we learned that youth are concerned about unemployment, HIV, teen pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and domestic violence. Some of these may be challenges that you already face, or that you will confront soon.
- We also learned, and this surprised us more, that today's youth feel somewhat estranged or separated from the generation that preceded them – from their teachers, government officials, traditional leaders, even from their parents.
- The activities that we have designed to address some of these challenges are many and they are wide-ranging, but basically our objectives are to apply our own resources and expertise in the following areas:
- We want to build leadership and mentoring skills to enable today's youth to lead the next generation,
- We want to provide knowledge and tools to allow them to live safe, healthy, and positive lives,
- We want to provide a platform for communication and networking so youth can help each other, and
- We want to amplify the impact of what youth are doing for themselves to encourage others to take on the challenge of building a brighter future.
- I believe strongly that your generation, at this stage in Botswana's development, has a unique – and in many ways, a very difficult challenge to bear.
- Your parents and grandparents were great stewards of a growing and successful young nation, one blessed with resources and visionary leadership.
- And make no mistake – their accomplishments are extraordinary. In fact, they are singular. At independence in 1966, Botswana was at the bottom of nearly every global development index. Today it is an upper-middle income country, democratic, stable, governed by the rule of law,

and the envy of much of the region. No small population, landlocked country anywhere in the world has ever done what Botswana has managed to do in less than 50 years.

- That is your legacy – extraordinary national achievement.
- Your generation however must do more than simply carry that torch forward. Because the world is a very different place today, and particularly because the resources that supported much of this nation’s early development are destined to dwindle, you must chart a new path to ensure that Botswana’s next forty years are as successful as – or more successful than – its first forty years.
- You must open new doors, take new risks, work harder in ways that the previous generations did not. The challenges that you face are very different from those faced by previous generations – but they are no less difficult.
- Forty years from now, Botswana’s diamond wealth will not be the engine of growth that they have been to date. So what will the new engines be? The question is yours to answer. No one else is going to step in and fill in the blanks.
- Will the bounty of natural resources with which this great country is blessed remain important? Almost certainly, yes, but only with new and more sophisticated knowledge and skills and infrastructure required to add value and move those resources to markets. That challenge is yours.
- Will the magnificent animals that roam this land draw even more visitors from other nations to support a crucial part of your economy? Probably so, but only with successful conservation efforts that ensure those resources’ sustainability along with the effective infrastructure and quality of service that will entice visitors from far away lands. That challenge is yours.
- Will Botswana, with its extraordinary history of growth and stability, take on an even greater leadership role in advancing progress across the region and throughout the continent?
- Perhaps, but only with the force of will and perseverance, and the confidence of conviction in doing what you know is right. That challenge is yours.
- These are indeed great challenges, but so too are the opportunities and the rewards. The world is a much smaller place than it was forty years ago when your parents and grandparents were busy laying the foundation for this nation.
- Words and data travel at the speed of light. Goods and services arrive from the other side of the globe in hours, not days or months.
- The education that you have already received and that many of you will go on to continue is far more capable of providing the skills and knowledge you will need to chart that new path.
- Yours is a great challenge – but you have the tools in your grasp, and you have an inheritance that proves it is possible to succeed beyond your wildest dreams.

- About those dreams --- You know, President Obama often tells young people in America to dream big dreams. After all, it worked out pretty well for him.
- But I think he means something much more than dreaming of a specific job you hope to have. I think he's talking about making your life's work about something bigger than yourself.
- Bigger than your success, bigger than your comfort, bigger than your job title or your fancy house or clothes.
- Make it about creating jobs for your countrymen and women. Make it about making your communities safer and healthier. Make it about fighting injustice, inspiring others, advancing knowledge that matters to whole world.
- At the end of the day, those things matter a lot more -- they are much, much bigger -- than the kind of car you drove.
- You can never go wrong quoting your boss. So I want to leave you with a few more words from my president. In his first year in office, he traveled to Accra, Ghana, to lay out the United States' vision for Africa.
- He said, "We must start from the simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans."
- Then he spoke directly to the young people of the continent, saying, "The world will be what you make of it. You have the power to hold your leaders accountable, and to build institutions that serve the people. You can serve in your communities, and harness your energy and education to create new wealth and build new connections to the world. You can conquer disease, and end conflicts, and make change from the bottom up."
- "You can do that," he concluded.
- In other words, YOU MATTER!
- Congratulations and good luck. Pula!!