KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY RIGHT HONOURABLE NAHAS ANGULA PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE ZERO TOLERANCE CAMPAIGN FOR GENDER BASED VIOLENCE OSHIKANGO BORDER
POST 31 JULY 2009 OHANGWENA REGION

Director of Ceremonies
Hon. Angelika Muharukua, Deputy Minister of MGECW
Hon. Members of Parliament
Hon. Usko Nghaamwa, Governor of Ohangwena Region
The Mayor of Helao Nafidi
Hon. Governors, Mayors and Councillors
Your Royal Highness Queen Mwadinomho
Members of the Council of Traditional Authority
USAID Mission Director, Mr. Gregory Gottlieb
UN Acting Country Representative, Ms. Mendes-Cole
Heads of UN Agencies in Namibia
National Youth Council General Secretary, Mr. Mandela Kapere
Representatives from the Media Institutions
Ladies and Gentlemen

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a subject that the Government of the Republic of Namibia is gravely concerned about, therefore, this gathering is truly historic in both its aims and goals. To address the ever widening experience of gender based violence is not only appropriate, but very urgent. Gender based violence is not the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. Yes, the MGECW should play a pivotal role in promoting awareness. However, it is the obligation of all citizens to uphold the spirit of the campaign against gender-based violence.

According to the United Nations definition, violence against women encompasses a wide range of abuses. These are "physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the general community, battering, sexual abuse of children, dowry-related violence, rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state."

In Namibia it can be deduced from the media reports that incidents of GBV are on the increase. These incidents include: murder, indecent assault, attempt rape, rape and grievous bodily harm. According to the National statistics on Gender Based Violence (GBV) 12,563 cases were reported to the Namibian police in 2007, of which grievous bodily harm recorded the highest with ten thousand, six hundreds and fifty-two (10,652) cases; followed by rape with one thousand, one hundred and eleven (1111), while murder is three hundred and twenty nine (329) cases. Indecent assault and attempted rape recorded three hundred (300) cases. The latest statistics (2008) has indicated that GBV cases decreased to 11611 reported cases. An indication that, GBV cases have slightly decreased or there was under reporting in the country.

Despite the apparent decrease in GBV cases countrywide, many incidents of women killed by their husbands/boyfriends are on the increase in Ohangwena region especially in this Constituency, Oshikango. Recently the media reported a young mother who was brutally killed by her boyfriend in the village around Oshikango. Again incidents of babies dumped by young mothers are also being reported in the media and mostly occurred in Erongo and Khomas regions. These incidents catch the nation by surprise and this is one of the areas this campaign is focusing on.

Ladies and Gentlemen
What are we to think when our hospital wards are filled to overflowing with women who require antibiotics, anti-retroviral and more often, gynaecological surgery to survive physical abuses? What are we to think when so many of those in our surgical and medical wards are children as young as five or six victims of child abuse? Can we expect that these children will ever overcome the horror and fear of the horrific violence done to them? And what of the women who, due to social stigma, choose never to reveal themselves as victims of such violence?

Ladies and Gentlemen
This cannot be allowed to continue. I am glad that this campaign is being launched here at Oshikango under the theme Zero Tolerance for Gender Based Violence: Report it to and stop it. This is a calling to all of us Namibians NOT to tolerate any form of violence against women and children, but to ACT against it.

We must commit ourselves to forging a better Namibia. A Namibia where we commit ourselves to fight violence against women and violence against any group of people; where we learn to speak out when small acts of injustice are committed; when small comments are made, knowing that they are profoundly connected to larger and more tangible acts of injustices. A society where we make an effort to understand what is going on in women’s lives and where we teach our girls that it is okay to say NO. One where we do not stop until we all can feel safe in our own homes. But most importantly, let us commit ourselves to a nation where women’s voices are heard, their words are validated, and the necessity for community and freedom become more important than tradition.

Ladies and Gentlemen
This campaign was necessitated by one of the Action-Oriented Recommendations developed during the National Conference on Gender Based Violence (GBV) held by the MGECW in June 2007 as an effort to seek solutions to the escalation of GBV in the country. The Objectives of the conference were to look at the causes and effects of GBV; linkage between GBV and HIV and AIDS; examine the challenge of implementing legislation on GBV; and to assess the interventions by the judiciary, police, social workers, medical personnel, traditional authorities, media, Church, Civil Society Organisations, and the Community. One of the recommendations from the conference was a national campaign on Zero Tolerance for Gender Based Violence.

The recognition that gender-based violence is a human rights issue is a crucial step forward in combating the growing incidence of global human trafficking and of particular concern when we approach issues such as child labour, human migration in the form of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls.

Along with GBV activities, the MGECW is responding to the growing concern on human trafficking which is increasingly problematic due to the upcoming world cup games in 2010 in South Africa. Trafficking in Persons is a significant human rights and development issue worldwide that affects men, women and children, and Namibia is no exception. In this respect, the MGECW in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture Water and Forestry; and with financial assistance from USAID/Namibia conducted a rapid assessment study on human trafficking in Namibia to provide some insights into the issues of trafficking in Namibia. The study was conducted in April this year (2009) in eight regions namely; Khomas, Ohangwena, Oshikoto, Caprivi, Kavango, Karas, Erongo and Omaheke. One of the recommendations from the study, is to launch national media awareness campaign on human trafficking.

Ladies and Gentlemen
The campaign on Zero Tolerance for GBV focuses on three areas: passion killing, baby dumping and human trafficking. Materials around these issues were developed with the objective to raise awareness among the public. This campaign will run for a period of three months and the public is expected to provide feedback through email and postal address provided by the MGECW. Your feedback in this regard will assist the government to evaluate the GBV interventions in place.

As you will witness today, these materials are radio drama series, posters, newspaper adverts, TV adverts and billboards. All these materials are in English, Oshivambo and Afrikaans and the Ministry is in the process of translating these materials in other local indigenous languages.

Ladies and Gentlemen
Without women’s participations in all spheres of development, Namibia will not develop at a normal pace. This launch coincides with the Pan African Women Day. The day that is being celebrated on the 31 July of each year by 53 African countries, Namibia included. The objective is to mark the achievements made by our women over the years. The Government of the Republic of Namibia acknowledges the contribution made by women before and after independence and continues to commit itself to the achievement of gender equality in Namibia through the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare.

To promote and improve the status and condition of women and girls in Namibia, various international, regional legal instruments have been signed, ratified and the process of domestization is ongoing. Such laws include the following: Married Persons Equality Act no. 1 of 1996, Combating of the Rape Act no. 8 of 2000, Combating of the Domestic Violence Act no. 4 of 2003, Maintenance Act no. 9 of 2003, Communal Land Reform Act no. 5 of 2002. These legal instruments have been simplified and translated into local languages. The work to simplify them into lay – man’s language as well as to translate them into local language is ongoing. Other activities include legal
literacy for various target groups such as traditional leaders, faith based organizations as well as the general public with the view to equip various segments of the population to know their rights and responsibility.

Tradition and religion have greater significance and of value for people in their daily lives and shape their behavior, attitudes and perceptions at household and at community level. Very often than not tradition is more recognized than the established statutory laws and these seem at times to be in conflict. Property grabbing is a phenomenon rearing its ugly head now and then especially for women married under customary law and where the husband dies interstate. Through legal literacy programmes, the MGECW informs people/ widows about their rights under the Communal Land Reform Act no 5 of 2002, and teaches them about the importance of WILL writing to protect their loved ones inheritances when they pass on.

The Ministry carried out a KAP (Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices) study on negative and positive cultural practices that mitigate against or perpetuate gender based violence. The report will be launched this year, and it will create an understanding of the relationship between culture and gender based violence and the implications for the effective implementation of the existing statutes on combating gender based violence.

I am informed that traditional leaders are also attending this launch. It is important that they familiarize themselves with the findings of this study and assist the MGECW to implement the recommendations from this study, since they are the custodians of culture and culture was pointed out as one of the contributing factors to gender based violence in Namibia. Norms, traditions and beliefs that fuel GBV in our society should be discouraged and those positive cultural practices should be promoted.

Ladies and gentlemen
In conclusion, you are the vanguard of compassion on the frontlines of this social and moral campaign against gender-based violence. And because you are on the frontlines, you have taken on a greater responsibility. Not only had to develop programs and policies to address this deep-seated cultural and societal injustice, but to foster the reconstruction of equality and understanding of issues related to women and children.

I truly hope that some day we will look back on gender-based violence as some strange and misguided evil that accompanied a particularly frustrated period in the development of this country. For only when we can speak of it in the past tense, only then will we be free to tell women and children they are safe in their homes and communities.

It is now my honour and privilege to declare the Zero Tolerance for GBV campaign officially launched.

I thank you!