

**Speech by USAID Namibia Director Diana Swain at the
Professional Enhancement Program Graduation
on June 29, 2002**

Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Weimers;
Honorable Minister Mutorwa;
Vice-Chancellor Katjivivi;
Professor Hangula;
Professor Snyder;
Professor Herman;
Dr. West;
Honored Graduates;
Ladies and Gentlemen; and,
All Soccer Fans Who Breathed A Sigh of Relief When The World Cup Was
Scheduled For Tomorrow and Not Today.

It is truly a privilege but also a genuine pleasure for me to be here this morning. I'd like to begin by applauding the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture for its willingness to make such a wise investment in the professional development of its staff. I'd like to commend the distinguished and highly committed professors at the participating universities for so ably guiding our graduates through their course work and research; and, most important, I would like to congratulate our graduates on their splendid achievement. As individuals and as institutions, you all have much to be proud of.

The degrees that are being awarded here today represent a lot of hard, and thoughtful work undertaken by an extremely dedicated, highly talented group of professionals. The task now is to ensure that the knowledge that has been acquired is applied in ways that will further strengthen the ability of what is already a high performance Ministry to provide Namibia's children with an education that will prepare them for productive and contented lives in today's world. As you undertake that task, I'd like to share with you a message that Dr. Martin Luther King delivered to a graduating class in the United States in 1965: The Message: Stay Awake During the Revolution.

In conveying his message, Dr. King reminded the graduates of the story of Rip Van Winkle. For those of you who have never read this story, Rip Van Winkle was a man in early America who slept for 20 years. When he went to sleep, his town inn had a picture of King George the III of England hanging on its sign. When he awoke, the picture was of George Washington, the first American president. Rip Van Winkle had slept through the American Revolution.

In Dr. King's opinion, there could be nothing more tragic than to sleep through a revolution. But there are, as he pointed out, many people who do just that. People who, in periods of change, fail to achieve the new mental perspectives that the new situation demands.

While we're now in a different time, in a different country, facing different issues, I believe that Dr. King's message is still a relevant one. Stay awake during the

revolution. What are the revolutions going on today? I'm sure that each of you could come up with a list of your own but let me give you mine as a starting point.

At the top of my list would be HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS could revolutionize the way we think, the way we work, and the way we behave. It could revolutionize the way we live. The Honorable Minister Mutorwa and others in the Ministry have shown tremendous leadership in taking measures to mitigate the impact of the disease on the education sector. Important steps are also being taken to strengthen the ability of teachers to deliver AIDS prevention messages in the classroom. Indeed, the Ministry has been wide awake in taking on HIV/AIDS. I'd encourage each of you to follow the lead the Ministry has set. Spend some serious time reflecting upon whether you, as an individual, are awake to, and acting on, what you can do to combat the disease - because the changes that HIV/AIDS will bring is a revolution that we all need to be awake for, in our personal lives, in our professional lives, and in our lives as citizens.

A revolution with more positive potential is the revolution in information technology. Whereas the industrial revolution transformed our understanding of human capacity in relation to energy and matter, the information technology revolution is transforming our understanding of human capacity in relation to time and distance. The faster and more pervasive flow of information across the planet suggests that knowledge and information are becoming, if not more important, then certainly equally as important, as the production factors of labor, raw material and capital.

Namibia, due to the foresight of its leaders, has one of the most sophisticated information and communications infrastructures in Africa. Soon to be introduced in Parliament is a bill that, if passed, will give Namibia one of the most progressive legal and regulatory frameworks for IT in the world. The keys to ensuring that Namibia reaps the benefits of the attractive enabling environment that has been put in place will be making the technology affordable for the average Namibian, and helping Namibians acquire the skills to use and apply the technology. It is in this latter category that the education sector, and you as leaders in the education sector, have a major role to play. Already, a good start has been made in introducing IT into the education sector, but much more can be done. Stay awake to the possibilities that this revolution offers Namibia, and to the opportunities that you have, in your positions at the Ministry, to promote its widespread use and application by not only administrators and teachers but by Namibia's future leaders, today's learners.

Finally, I would encourage you all to stay awake during the revolution called globalization. There are both upsides and downsides to globalization. The only way to ensure that Namibia is able to take advantage of the upsides and avoid the downsides is by providing its people with an education that is relevant to the modern world. In a presentation she made at the 1999 Conference on the African Renaissance, Micere Mugo, a Kenyan writer and academic, cites Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, in describing two types of education. The first type of education is characterized as "bankable education." Here the teacher acts as the "banker" or "despoitor" who stuffs information into the learner, who becomes the "receptacle." The second type of education is described as "problem solving" education. In this situation, the learner is at the center of the process and the teacher serves as a resource person.

The “bankable education,” according to Mugo’s presentation, propagates a culture of dependency, fear and silence. The “problem-solving” education nurtures a culture of reflection, experimentation, dialogue and self-assertion. It is a “problem solving” education that will provide learners with the tools they need to make it in today’s world. The Ministry and NIED have recognized this. Great progress is being made in helping teachers adopt a “learner-centered” approach that will develop, within today’s learners, the skills to become Namibia’s successful entrepreneurs, democratic leaders, and social innovators of the future. Be awake to what you can do to extend and deepen a learner-centered approach to education.

Dr. King’s “Stay Awake During the Revolution” speech was a powerful one. But even more powerful was the speech he gave entitled, “I Have A Dream.” Those of you who know the speech will remember that he dreamt of a time when the United States would live out the true meaning of its creed that all men are created equal. He dreamt of a day in which children would be judged by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin, when every hill and every mountain would be made low, and every crooked place made straight.

I know that you all have dreams for your country as well. I know that many of you dream of a country where the people are empowered to address the issues of the times, where HIV/AIDS has been beaten back, where unemployment is a marginal issue, and where poverty is unknown. The foundation on which all dreams can be realized is the education system that you all are such a vital part of. Stay awake during the revolution and have a dream. Hard to stay awake and have a dream at the same time, you might say. But let me leave you with a quote from Lawrence of Arabia that I believe ties together the messages in Dr. King’s two speeches. He contrasts those who dream at night with those who dream during the day. “All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes to make it possible.”

Stay awake during the revolution and dream with your eyes wide open. I wish you all the best in the future and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you on such an important occasion.