

UN Resident Coordinator a.i. greets FLON as she arrives at the #BeFree SADC Youth Dialogue. UN Namibia



## #BeFree Youth Dialogue during the 38th SADC Summit

**17 August, Windhoek:** Leaders and role models from across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) engaged with the youth as part of the #BeFree SADC Youth Dialogue held at Vibe Club in Windhoek on 17 August 2018.

Under the leadership of H.E. the First Lady of Namibia (FLON) Madame Monica Geingos, the youth had the opportunity to talk openly with FLON as well as the First Ladies of Angola and Botswana and the Minister of Youth of Zimbabwe representing the First Lady of Zimbabwe. The youth also had a chance to engage with other sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) stakeholders through panel discussions, including the Permanent Secretary of Education, Arts and Culture and other services providers.

At the event, FLON reminded the youth that they should dedicate their time to activities that will make them better people, empower them and help chart the way forward toward their futures. Along the same lines, she emphasised the importance

of the youth identifying toxic friends and staying away from them. She also encouraged the youth to find a stress-relief outlet, such as participating in sports.

FLON also highlighted the importance of engaging young men from an early age at home. “We have more young boys forming gangs for petty crimes. They join for protection, sense of belonging and economic benefits - these are things that a family should provide. Young boys are finding families in gangs,” she said.

#BeFree Movement Ambassador, Bertha Tobias said, “#BeFree is in the name: It provides a safe space for the youth to feel free and have conversations that they often are afraid to have with their parents. It is the starting point.”

The #BeFree campaign was launched in November 2016 and has already covered the 14 regions of the country. It brings together young people, service providers, local authorities and development partners for deep and open discussions around SRHR/HIV, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), drug abuse, communication between parents and children, youth empowerment and more. These topics are important for the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development and are aligned with the United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPAF) with the Government of the Republic of Namibia.

The #BeFree SADC Youth Dialogue took place during the 38th SADC Summit, which was held in Windhoek from 17 - 18 August under the theme “Promoting Infrastructure Development and Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development.”

The UN Family was represented by the Resident Coordinator a.i., Rachel Odede, UNAIDS Country Director, Dr Tharcisse Barihuta, UNFPA Officer in Charge (OIC), Loide Amkongo and other staff members.