

## First Lady leads the call to “Start Free, Stay Free, AIDS Free” in Rocky Crest Youth Event

**Windhoek-** Rocky Crest Secondary School hosted their second #BeFree event under the leadership of H.E. First Lady Monica Geingos on October 7, 2017. As Special Advocate for Young Women and Adolescent Girls, she champions messages on empowerment, open community dialogue, HIV prevention and SRH awareness.



First Lady is joined by UNAIDS Country Director, UNFPA Country Representative, youth, and parents during a fun walk before the start of #BeFree event

The #BeFree event is part of the global movement of “Start Free, Stay Free, AIDS Free” which encourages healthy habits and health seeking behaviour in order to prevent HIV transmission and suppress HIV viral load within people living with HIV so as to live a healthy and positive life.

The First Lady kicked off the #BeFree event with a fun walk with learners, parents, and educators to meet the group in an interactive and energizing way. The energy was kept up with entertainers such as DJ Snoop, the Rocky Crest Choir, and The Uncommon Legacy dance crew which led into highly dynamic and catalytic personal testimonies, debate and panel discussions.



First Lady of the Republic of Namibia (FLON), Monica Geingos speaking to youth, parents and educators about relationships, trust, and HIV.

Personal testimonies were shared by two youth regarding resilience through cyber bullying and life lessons from an inmate convicted of rape. This was followed by a lively debate on the role of environment on an individual’s success, and finally a panel discussion on adolescent sexual behaviour, extent of parental involvement in the lives of adolescents, and behavioural problems. The panellists included a psychologist, police officer, learners, parents, a registered nurse and a life skills teacher. As a key speaker on the panel, UNFPA Country Representative Ms Denna Gayle emphasized that, “We need

to relate to youth with language that they use and understand in order to better communicate the message in a manner that resonates with them”.

The main activity of the #BeFree event was the First Lady speaking directly to learners and parents about self-leadership, using given and found environmental influences as a catalyst to growth, and having open dialogue between learners and trusted adults to make responsible and well-informed decisions.

“If you take nothing else from today’s event” said the First Lady, “take this: Accept who you are, what you are, and where you are, then focus on how you will change things for the better”.

Learners, parents and educators were inspired by the frank communication of difficult topics in order to build stronger relationships and make conscious and right decisions about choice of peers and life such as their own sexual reproductive health. The youth especially felt motivated by the event and said that they “have gained so much confidence in the #BeFree movement that [they] won’t stop until [they] make a difference”.