



Remarks for
Dennia Gayle, UNFPA Representative to
Namibia
on behalf of the
United Nations Resident Coordinator a.i.
Rachel Odede
on the occasion of
the Menstrual Hygiene Day
Commemoration

28 May 2018

Namibia

Director of Ceremonies;

Hon. Juliet Kavetuna, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services;

Ms Sanet Steenkamp, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture;

Hon. Festus Ueitele, Governor of Omaheke Region;

Mr. P. Semba, Regional Director for Education;

Ms Rejoice Ikuambi, Secretary General AfriYAN;

Representatives of the Government of the Republic of Namibia;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Fellow members of the United Nations Country Team;

Members of the civil society organisations, NGOs and academia;

UN Colleagues;

Invited Guests;

Members of the media;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Girls and Boys;

Good morning!

I welcome this opportunity to stand before you to commemorate Menstrual Hygiene Day.

Launched in 2014, this observance aims to create a world in which every woman and adolescent girl can manage her menstruation in a healthy and hygienic way, in privacy and with dignity.

Under the theme, “Empowerment through Menstrual Hygiene Management”, this year’s commemoration aims to break the silence and build awareness about the fundamental role that good menstrual health and hygiene management (MHHM) plays in enabling women and girls to reach their full potential.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The onset of puberty and the menstruation cycle is a fundamental and healthy aspect of the existence of women and girls. Menstrual health management is directly linked to the fulfilment of human rights and serves as a precondition for attaining rights such as health or education, and also as a matter of dignity in its own right.

However, across the globe, women and adolescent girls face challenges as a result of it.

- An estimated one in 10 school-age African girls do not attend school during menstruation¹.
- Without access to sanitary items, girls might miss four days of school every four weeks².
- Adolescent girls' full participation in school is negatively affected – qualitative data has shown that girls avoid participating, standing up and writing on blackboards as they are afraid of menstruation accidents³.

Menstrual health and hygiene is fundamental to the dignity and well-being of women and girls, and it is an important part of women's and adolescent girls' rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although Namibia has made great strides in gender equality and empowering women and adolescent girls, socio-economic challenges and barriers exist which threaten women's and adolescent girls' right to basic hygiene, sanitation and reproductive health services.

Firstly, the lack of access to quality sanitation facilities poses a challenge, as women and adolescent girls do not have the privacy or infrastructure for hygienic menstrual management.

¹ WHO and UNICEF. 2013. Progress on sanitation and drinking-water – 2013 update. Geneva, WHO.

² World Bank. 2005. Toolkit on Hygiene Sanitation & Water in Schools: Gender Roles and Impact.

³ UNESCO. 2014. Good Policy and Practice in Health Education, Booklet 9: Puberty Education and Menstrual Hygiene Management.

- Nationally, 67% of Namibians do not have access to improved sanitation facilities, however this figure is closer to 94% in the rural areas⁴.

Secondly, many women and adolescent girls do not have sanitary products that are accessible, effective, comfortable, convenient, affordable and safe to use and change; and tend to resort to using unsanitary and ineffective materials.

- Sanitary products are not prioritised as necessity items in family spending, which is compounded by the gendered nature of households and communities.
- In addition, this also makes girls vulnerable to offers of sexual exchanges for money, toiletries, and sanitary products.

Finally, there remains a taboo about menstruation, as it continues to be associated with uncleanliness and shame. As a result;

- Women and adolescent girls may be discouraged from their daily activities, affected by stigma and discrimination or isolated from their friends and local communities during menstruation;
- Women and adolescent girls do not receive comprehensive, age appropriate information;

⁴ Namibia Statistics Agency. Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey 2016 Report.

- Women and adolescent girls are forced to deal with their menstruation without the necessary information, supplies, or facilities; and
- It increases the risk of low concentration in class, discomfort, school absence and drop-out, affects work performance, and presents negative implications for their reproductive and mental health.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The global community, including Namibia has committed to a set of 17 Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to end poverty, protect the environment and ensure prosperity for all people, including women and adolescent girls.

The SDGs speak to menstrual health and hygiene management through Goal 3 'Good Health', Goal 4 'Quality Education', Goal 5 'Gender Equality' and Goal 6 'Clean Water and Sanitation'.

For all women and adolescent girls to live in prosperity, have access to education as well as participate fully and meaningfully as an empowered work force, they must have access to quality menstrual health and hygiene management.

It is equally important for men and boys to talk about menstrual health and hygiene more freely so that they can support the menstrual needs of women and girls at home, schools and communities; that will help to remove the

barriers, stigma and discrimination so frequently associated with this normal life recurrence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in conclusion,

If we are to leave no one behind, the aim of not only the Sustainable Development Goals, but also Namibia's national development agenda, we must work together to ensure that women and girls are provided with the necessary information, resources, skills, social support, and facilities required to manage their menstrual lifecycle needs.

In Namibia, through our joint partnership framework with the Government, the United Nations works to address issues surrounding health, education and gender. Specifically, the UN is supporting the National School Health Task Force and strengthening school health systems, promoting Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) across the country as well as building capacities of the education and health sectors in terms of sexual and reproductive health through training.

The UN, your 'Partner of Choice', remains committed to identifying and implementing targeted and strategic solutions towards girls' and women's health, well-being, mobility, educational and economic empowerment, and dignity in their quest to realise their full potential.

I thank you!