Remarks by the UNICEF Representative,
Ms. Micaela Marques de Sousa
On the occasion of
Private Sector Partnership Engagement Advocacy Dinner
In commemoration of the Day of the African Child
14 June 2016, Strand Hotel, Swakopmund

Director of Ceremony,

- Hon. Minister Doreen Sioka, Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare
- Hon. Cleophas Mutjavikua, Governor of the Erongo Region
- Ms. Yvonne Chaka Chaka, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador
- Ms. Kiki Gbeho, UN Resident Co-ordinator,
- Dr Monir Islam, WHO Country Representative
- Senior Government Officials here present
- Esteemed Partners from the corporate world
- Members of Civil Society
- Members of the media

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this Private Sector Partnership Engagement Advocacy Dinner. An event which is being held as preamble to the 2016 commemoration of the Day of the African Child.

I wish to recognise your presence tonight as a critical indication of the significance attached to the welfare and wellbeing of all the beautiful children Namibia.

As most of you are aware, the Day of the African Child has its genesis in the dark and dreadful days of an era that deliberately ignored justice, respect for human dignity, freedom and liberty, and indeed the rights and welfare of children.
But tonight, as we prepare to join in these continental commemorations on Thursday 16 June, there is much to celebrate on the promotion and protection of children’s rights on the continent as a whole and in Namibia in particular.

Through the on-going efforts of Government, there is sustained poverty reduction, increased immunisation coverage, more children enrolled in school, great progress in combatting AIDS, more children surviving their fifth birthdays than ever before and better access to clean water.

**Distinguished Guests,**

One would then wonder why we are here tonight. We are here to remind partners in Namibia that there are thousands of children who are still being left behind. National statistics showing overall success have often masked the sad reality that within Namibia, progress remains uneven, inequitable, unfair and sometimes absent.

We are here to build on the moral necessity and conviction that all children must have a fair opportunity to live full, healthy lives, no matter where they live, no matter what barriers they face.

**Distinguished Guests**

Many of us have read media reports of the tragic effects of extreme food shortages caused by drought. We have all seen images of abused children and have shed tears when hearing of the dreary loss of lives of children or their parents to violence.

We have heard of the thousands of children who suffer from diarrheal diseases because of the high prevalence of open defecation or of children who fail to regularly attend school because hygiene facilities are not in place at the school.
We have lived with children with physical and mental challenges, whose opportunities in life are limited because of stigma and discrimination, and we have lived with young people who remain excluded from societies for fear of revealing their HIV positive status.

We also now know that Namibia’s classification as an Upper Middle Income Country in 2009, reflects strong economic growth. Again, the average conceals the inequalities. The child poverty rate remains higher than the national poverty rate, with one in three children living in households below the poverty line, with multiple deprivations.

Honourable Minister Doreen Sioka

We have lost more than we should have. The country is being deprived of the next generation of artisans, farmers, consumers, politicians and parents.

Allow me put a face to this situation.

In a village among the Himba community in the Kunene Region, 18 month old Kataeko, is underweight from birth. Her family has not produced much from the fields and so there is always little food to eat in the house. She is often hungry and rarely gets the variety of nutrients she needs.

The long distances between the home and the nearest health facility have prevented the mother from having the support of nurses and doctors.

Her older siblings spend the day with her at home, unable to attend school because their births have not been registered. Again resources have constrained the families from seeking these services.
Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen:

I am sharing this example not as a way to create despair, but to demonstrate how the private sector partners have helped change the ending of Kataeko’s story.

Since 2010, the Government of Namibia, with support from UNICEF, World health Organisation and USAID, and in partnership with a private sector company, Teck Resources, unveiled the Health Extension Worker Programme.

A nominal start-up capital from Teck Resources was more than enough to build a proof of concept on the value of deploying community based agents to support families such as Kataeko’s. Daily support from a dedicated Health Extension Worker has helped the family with Kataeko’s health and also supported the siblings to access registration services.

Distinguished guests

Throughout Namibia today, a critical mass of 1,500 of these community Health Extension Workers has become an indispensable part of the health and social services delivery system, positioned to bring primary health care services, social services and support closer to communities, families, women and children in Namibia.

The Government of Namibia is now fully funding this innovative approach to saving the lives of children, which was birthed through contributions from your peers in the corporate world.

A key lesson we learn with the above case study is that when there is a critical need on the ground, there is no support too big or too small. What is important is how the different resource bases can be leveraged to maximise results for children.

Distinguished guests:

There are a number of compelling reasons for UNICEF to engage the business sector holistically as a positive force for the promotion of child rights. We believe that building partnerships and collaborative relationships with the private sector is critical to deliver results for children.
We now know that with each inequity (like that experienced by Kataeko) that is not addressed, we will be sowing the seeds of tomorrow’s inequalities. Fortunately, the Sustainable Development Goals dinator, as mentioned by the United Nations Resident Coordinator are presenting to all of us, an opportunity to address the unfinished business left behind from the Millennium Development Goals.

To end the vicious cycle of inequality is to set in motion a virtuous cycle – a cycle in which every child like Kataeko’s offspring, gets a fair chance to survive, to grow up healthy and protected, to attend school, and to more fully contribute to her future and the future of her society.

To do this we will require focused partnerships with governments, development partners, business leaders, academia, innovators, and civil society. And it will require effective and equitable investment in the most disadvantaged children. National plans, budgets and social and economic policies need to be constructed with the most deprived children at the heart of the agenda.

Achieving the SDGs could give every child a fair chance in life. What we decide to do for children and how we engage them in building the future will ultimately determine whether we are successful in creating a more peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Namibia.

We at UNICEF and indeed as the United nations family believe that tonight, marks the beginning of a strong partnership. We will continue to engage with you, the players in the business and corporate sector so that we extend the allegiance of forces working to ensure the health, education, equality and protection of all children is advanced. We believe each one of us has a role to play and we believe that the willingness to do so is strong.

In closing, allow me to emphasise that the future of humanity, indeed the future of our country depends on giving children the best possible start in life — quality health care, nutrition and education…clean water and sanitation…protection from violence, abuse and exploitation… and a decent standard of living. They are children today, but tomorrow, they are the employers and employees, the politicians and the voters, the producers and consumers; the fathers and mothers. The Shapers of this beautiful country.

I thank you