**Remarks by UNICEF Representative**

**Ms. Micaela Marques De Sousa**

**At the Launch of the Report: Child poverty in Namibia – A child-centered analysis of the NHIES 2009/10**

Director of Ceremonies

Honourable Minister of Gender Equality & Child Welfare Ms. Doreen Sioka

UNDP Representative in Namibia Mr Musinga Bandora

Statistician General of Namibia Statistics Agency Dr John Steytler

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Government Officials

Members of the Press

Distinguished Guests

Colleagues and Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure and gratitude that I stand here before you to witness yet another milestone for the country and for the children of Namibia, the launch of the Child poverty report. I first would like to congratulate the Namibia Statistics Agency for preparing the first ever child centered poverty analysis report in Namibia– forcing all of us to look at poverty from a child’s perspective.

Namibia is still faced with challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goal one of *Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, by 2015*. This challenge is exacerbated by economic inequality attributed to historic legacies and the impact of HIV and AIDS on families, communities and especially on children across the country.

Scientific evidence show that child poverty has deep and long-lasting impacts on children, starting with higher risk of low birth weight and child mortality, poor nutrition and high levels of stunting, lower performance at school and lower levels of emotional and psychosocial well-being. It is therefore important to understand that if child poverty is not addressed early on, poor children will become poor adults and so poverty will be passed on to the next generation

The First step to tackle child poverty is to recognize what child poverty is. Evidence presented in the child poverty report enables us to understand child poverty in the context of Namibia – to know where it is and to identify the levels of child poverty in relation to the various levels in our communities and families.

The Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2009/10 shows that poverty has been substantially reduced in recent years – about 70,000 less children are living in poverty compared to 345,000 in 2003/04. This is good news.

However poverty continues to affect far too many children and their families. We will hear later from the next speakers that almost 275,000 children continue to live in poverty. We will also hear that children are more likely to be poor than the overall population – with the report indicating that about 34% of children are poor compared to 29% of the general population.

This means that the commitments made by the government which are demonstrated through significant investments in social sectors in the past two decades, has not translated into major improvements in many development outcomes for children, women and families.

Namibia stands out as one of the few countries in Africa with a comprehensive social protection system, providing social grants to pensioners, people with disability, orphans and some other groups of vulnerable children.

Evidence from the report articulates the important role that social grants are playing in addressing poverty, including child poverty. However, the report also shows that grants are not yet reaching the most vulnerable and those that need them the most. Poor and vulnerable children with both parents alive can currently not access child welfare grants.

UNICEF believes that getting these children onto grants would have a dramatic impact on child poverty rates: child poverty could be reduced by more than 20% and extreme poverty could be almost eradicated. Child welfare grants could ensure that children’s nutrition, health and education are no longer depending on whether or not their caregivers have sufficient income.

We know that Child poverty cannot be addressed by social grants alone. We need to have concerted efforts to ensure that all sectors of development work together – we need to bring parents into work that pays, ensure that children are getting quality health care and education and that existing social services support families that need them the most.

We at UNICEF are proud to be associated with such an important exercise, and through the presence of all stakeholders here today, want to commend the Namibian Government at large, and the Namibia Statistics Agency in particular for providing us with this much awaited evidence and bring up the issue of child poverty in Namibia to the forefront of attention.

Getting this report launched today is another major landmark for Namibia. We are hopeful that with this report, we will be able to come up with sustainable solutions to better programme for poor children and their families wherever they might be and especially those in hard to reach places.

The mandate is clear: All children in Namibia represent our challenge, our hope and our reason for being here. UNICEF is honoured to be partnering with Namibia Statistics Agency in this crucial undertaking and we are hopeful that this is the beginning of a solid and long partnership.

Thank You.