

REMARKS BY THE UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE

OPENING SESSION OF THE 4TH JUNIOR NATIONAL COUNCIL

30 AUGUST 2026

Rt. Hon. Elizah Ngurare, Prime Minister;

Hon. Lucas Sinimbo, Chairperson of the National Council;

H.E. Zhao Weiping, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China;

Honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished senior Government officials;

Our Junior Councillors;

Members of the media;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning to you all.

Before I begin my remarks, permit me, Honourable Right Prime Minister and Honourable Chairperson of the National Council, to convey the warm greetings of the UNICEF Representative, Samuel Ocran, who is currently out of the country and, unfortunately, is unable to join us in person today. He would have very much wished to be here himself to participate in this important occasion and to share his remarks with you. He has therefore kindly asked me to deliver his speech on his behalf. I wish to convey his sincere apologies for not being able to be with us today, as well as his warm greetings and best wishes to all those gathered here. With your kind permission, I will now deliver his remarks as prepared and entrusted to me.

It is a real pleasure and honour to be here with you this morning for the opening of the 4th Junior National Council. Let me begin by thanking the National Council for creating this important space for children and young people. This is more than a meeting. It is an opportunity for young people to experience participation, to express their views, to listen to one another and to engage with issues that matter to their lives and to the future of Namibia. I also want to recognise the presence of the Right Honourable Prime Minister, the Chairperson of the National Council, Honourable Members of Parliament and senior Government officials. Your presence here today

sends a very important message to our young people: that their voices matter, their experiences matter and that they have a place in the national conversation.

And to our Junior Councillors, I want to speak directly to you. You have been given a very special opportunity. Please make the most of it. Speak with confidence. Ask questions. Share your experiences. Listen with respect. Think beyond yourselves and think about the children and communities you represent.

Some of the children whose voices you carry may never have the opportunity to sit in a room like this. Think about the child in your school who struggles to access clean water. Think about the child who misses school because of difficulties at home. Think about the child living with a disability, or the young person who has an idea but does not feel confident enough to speak.

When you speak here, remember them too.

Namibia has made good progress in bringing clean water to people. Today, 93.9 per cent of Namibians have access to basic water services. But not every child has the same access. In Khomas, access is 99.8 per cent, while in //Kharas it is 79.8 per cent and in Kunene 77.3 per cent. Sanitation is an even bigger challenge. Only 66.6 per cent of Namibians have access to improved sanitation, and 47.2 per cent still practise open defecation. The difference between urban and rural areas is especially large. 70.9 per cent of rural households practise open defecation, compared with 25.3 per cent in urban areas. But these numbers are not just numbers. They are about children. They are about whether a child has clean water to drink, a safe toilet to use and a place to wash their hands. When children do not have these basic things, they can become sick, miss school and find it harder to learn and grow. For girls especially, having a safe and private toilet is important for their dignity, safety and ability to stay in school.

That is why this year's theme, "Towards Universal Access to Water, Sanitation, Hygiene for Every Namibian Child," is so important. Water, sanitation and hygiene are not only about water and toilets. They are about your health, your education, your safety, your dignity and your rights. Every child has the right to grow up healthy, safe and with dignity. It should not matter whether you live in a city or in a rural community. Every child in Namibia deserves clean water, a safe toilet and good hygiene. No child should be left behind. So today, let us remember that when we make sure every child has clean water, sanitation and hygiene, we are helping children to stay healthy, go to school, learn, dream and reach their full potential.

That is the Namibia we want, a Namibia where every child has the opportunity to thrive. Every child, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances, has rights. The right to health. The right to education. The right to protection. And the right to express their views and to be heard on matters that affect their lives. The Junior National Council brings that principle to life. It gives young people a space to participate and to engage with the institutions that shape the country. But I also want to encourage you to think beyond this room. When we see a challenge, it is natural to ask, “What can Government do?” “What can UNICEF do?” “What can others do?”

Those are important questions.

But I would also encourage you to ask yourselves: “What can I do?” What can you do in your school? What can you do in your community? What can you do with your friends? You do not need to wait until you are older. You do not need a big budget. You do not need a position of authority. If you see that a water point in your school is not being properly looked after, what can you do? If your school environment needs attention, what can you do? If a younger child needs help, what can you do? If there is a problem in your community, can you bring other young people together and think about a solution? You may not be able to solve everything. None of us can. But each of us can do something. And sometimes leadership begins with something very simple: seeing a problem and deciding that you will not simply walk past it.

That is leadership. Leadership is not only about having a title. It is about caring enough to act. It is about listening. It is about helping others. It is about asking, “How can I contribute?” You may be young, but you already have influence. Your friends listen to you. Younger children look up to you. Your schools and communities are shaped, in small ways, by what you choose to do.

Use that influence well. As you participate in this JNC, I encourage you to listen carefully to one another. You will hear experiences from different parts of Namibia, and some of those experiences may be very different from your own. Listen to them. Learn from them. Let them broaden your understanding. And when you return home, remember that the purpose of your participation is not simply to come back with a list of recommendations. It is also to bring back ideas, confidence and a willingness to contribute. When you go home, take an idea with you. Take something you have learned from another young person. And, perhaps most importantly, take one commitment about what you will do differently.

Maybe you will organise something in your school. Maybe you will help improve hygiene practices. Maybe you will support a younger child. Maybe you will bring other young people together around an issue that matters to your community.

Whatever it is, start. Do not wait for someone else to build the community you want to live in. Be part of building it. I want to once again recognise the National Council for the leadership it is showing through this initiative. Creating a space where children and young people can engage with national institutions is an important investment in Namibia's future. And the presence of the Prime Minister, the Chairperson of the National Council, Members of Parliament and senior Government officials today makes that message even stronger.

For UNICEF, this is an important part of our partnership with Namibia. We remain committed to working with Government, the National Council, communities and young people to advance the rights and well being of every child. We will continue to support efforts that help children access essential services, including water, sanitation, hygiene, health and education. But we also recognise that progress is strongest when we work together, with young people not only as beneficiaries, but as partners in shaping solutions. Junior Councillors, I hope you will enjoy these few days. Use this opportunity. Learn from each other. Ask questions. Share your experiences. Listen to different perspectives. Think about the children who are not in this room. And when you return to your communities, do something with what you have learned. The future of Namibia is not something that will suddenly arrive one day. It is being shaped today, in our schools, our homes, our communities and in the choices we make every day.

You are already part of that future. So speak with courage, listen with respect, think beyond yourselves and others, and take responsibility for the part you can play. You do not have to change everything. But you can change something. And sometimes, one small action by one young person can inspire another, and another, until an entire community begins to move. That is the spirit I hope you will carry from this Junior National Council.

On behalf of UNICEF, I wish you a very successful, meaningful and inspiring 4th Junior National Council.

I look forward to hearing your voices, your ideas and, most importantly, your solutions.

Thank you very much.