

HIGH-LEVEL FORUM ON THE STATE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LESOTHO NATIONAL REFORMS

Opening Remarks

Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, UN Resident Coordinator

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Lumela Bo 'mé le bo ntate. Allow me to pay my respects to:

HIS MAJESTY KING LETSIE III;

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE PRIME MINISTER;

HONOURABLE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE;

HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY;

HIS LORDSHIP THE PRESIDENT OF THE COURT OF APPEAL;

HIS LORDSHIP THE CHIEF JUSTICE;

HONOURABLE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER;

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT;

HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT;

THEIR LORDSHIPS JUDGES OF THE COURT OF APPEAL AND THE HIGH COURT;

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

ALL PROTOCOL OBSERVED

- This morning I would like to join you on a journey that you started a few years ago. Walking in the beautiful mountain kingdom towards the Lesotho you want. In trying to join you on this journey, I have gone back to the beginning to allow me to understand and appreciate your dreams and vision for this country
- On the 11th March, 2022, I was privileged to join you all as we celebrated King Moshoeshoe I, the founding father of the Basotho nation. He was the giant of his time. He was a great strategist and peacemaker, and an ethical leader.
- In one of the best biographical studies of King Moshoeshoe (*Moshoeshoe, Chief of the Sotho*, published in 1975, almost a hundred years after the reign of Moshoeshoe), the author (Peter Sanders) comes to the following conclusion after doing thorough scientific historical research: *“In terms of achievement, he (Moshoeshoe) was one of the most successful South Africans of the nineteenth century; in terms of perception, one of the most far-sighted. In a period of conflict, he strove for peace, and his tolerance and humanity far transcended the bigotry and racialism of so many around him.”*
- In trying to understand the journey that you are on, it is to the founder of this nation that I turned. When looking at the process that you have been on as a Nation, it is clear to see that the National Reforms Process tries to embody those values that were present at the establishment of this nation. The values of peace, and mutual respect that all Basotho desire to see and enjoy in their nation. The need for structures, systems and resources that contribute to making the lives of Basotho better and their lived experiences filled with dignity. A nation where every citizen has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to their full potential. That is my understanding of what the founder of this nation was about and that is what I believe I see in the National Reforms process.
- Starting with the national dialogues that took place during 2018 and 2019 which brought together the voices and inputs of Basotho through (1) broad-based in-district conversations, sectoral and diaspora consultations; (2) six National Leaders Forums; and (3) syntheses and consolidation of Basotho’s views and recommendations adopted by Plenary II. I commend the government and the national reforms authority for ensuring that the voices of Basotho mattered.
- This process has come a long way. In addition to the Plenary II reforms recommendations, you have been able to put in place the NRA Act and establish the NRA and its Secretariat, which have been diligently pursuing their responsibilities and helping the country to ensure that the work on the national reforms would continue having the priority space and focus that they deserve.
- While facing the constraints of time and resources to deliver, the NRA and its secretariat have managed to deliver on a number of significant reform legislations adopted by

Plenary II. The formulation of the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution, popularly known as the Omnibus Bill, is one of these major accomplishments by the NRA.

- Now it is for Parliament to consider the Omnibus Bill. As we all await the outcomes of the deliberations, we hope that the ultimate winners will be the people of Lesotho
- The journey so far has been long and tasking but worthwhile in many ways as it sets the Basotho on a path that shall have positive inter-generational effects in terms of peace, security, stability and development.
- It is therefore important that as leaders you all work together to ensure that the dialogue and reform process goes forward and any set-backs that may be encountered along the way are dealt with.
- These bold reforms that are being considered by the Mountain Kingdom to entrench a democratic and rules-based political culture; and, to deepen the understanding that peaceful transition of power is the cornerstone of sustainable democracy and durable peace, need to be nurtured. The success of the reform process is therefore highly dependent on two things: First, political will and ability to sustain a common vision of the 'Lesotho we Want.'
- Second, the continued engagement of the people of Lesotho in the process. While it is clear that different groups were engaged in the national dialogues, steps must be taken to see to it that people continue to be part of understanding the recommendations, their implications on people lives and the transformation that they will bring.
- This is particularly important at a time when Basotho are concerned about the worsening socio-economic conditions in the country. The impact of COVID 19 has left many without jobs. Climate Change continues to have an impact on food security. Gender based violence is a scourge that must be addressed. And essential public services together with the right infrastructure are key to the everyday lives of people.
- The reforms, while not being a one stop solution for all ills, nevertheless, provide hope that people's lives will improve due to a new order of public resources management, checks and balances, political stability and a focus on the development agenda.
- It is recognised that the next stage of implementing reforms will require more resources, more partners and better coordination of the whole process. This requires collective reflection on what has been learned from the two phases of the national reforms process and what can be improved. This Forum provides that opportunity -and it is y hope that all those participating will make the best use of the time and space allocated for engagement and discussions.

- Allow me to end with a few recognitions and acknowledgements. In the course of the years, the government and its coalition partners, the opposition parties in-and-outside of parliament have made important contributions to moving the national reforms process forward. The SADC Facilitation Team has helped to keep the process focussed on vision, purpose and specific outcomes. We note as well, the significant contributions made by non-state actors including civil society groups led by the Lesotho Council of NGOs.
- We thank the NRA for a job well done. We thank our development partners the EU, AU, Common Wealth and others - and our own UNDP and UN PBF for the financial and technical support they continue to provide in our strive to the “Lesotho We Want”.
- The UN family remains committed and stands in solidarity with the Basotho on this journey of reforms and national cohesion. In so doing, we recognize the resource gaps and shall continue to reach out to bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors and the international community to collectively support Lesotho’s efforts.
- Once again, we express that the future of the national reforms process need to be considered in-depth and mechanisms/structures of continuity should be properly outlined and agreed upon by all stakeholders.
- In these 4-days, we very much look forward to reviewing the journey we have so far taken with the Basotho – and also at the end of the Forum to map out where to go from here.
- In conclusion, the UN in Lesotho wishes to underscore, commend and congratulate His Majesty and the Right Honourable the Prime Minister, the State and Government they lead and the Basotho on getting the reforms this far. We are honoured to be here and to be part of this process of transformation.
- I will end as I started. With the words of the late King Moshoeshoe I

“I want peace. Peace is the rain that makes the grass grow. War is the wind that dries it up”. May the Kingdom of Lesotho always know peace of mind, peace of body, development peace and peace in all its fullness.

Kea Leboa,

Khotso! Pula! Nala!