



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE KINGDOM
OF LESOTHO TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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STATEMENT

BY

**THE RIGHT HONOURABLE PAKALITHA BETHUEL MOSISILI
PRIME MINISTER OF THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO**

DELIVERED AT

**THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING AND COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF
THE PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN REALISING THE TARGETS SET
OUT IN THE DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT ON HIV/AIDS**

**JUNE 2, 2006
NEW YORK**

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Mr. President,

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Your Excellency, Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President

We are once again gathered here to take stock of what we set ourselves to achieve over the past five years since the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS. Indeed, this high level meeting offers us a unique opportunity to assess progress in the implementation of that all-important commitment, and to reaffirm our previous commitments on HIV and AIDS from the national, regional, continental and now global level.

Lesotho has a population of 2.2 million people and a prevalence rate of HIV infection of 23.2% (GOL/UNAIDS 2005). 266,000 of our nationals are estimated to live with HIV, of whom 16,000 are children under 14 years of age. The estimated number of people in need of anti-retroviral therapy in Lesotho is now 43,000. On the average, 24,000 people died of AIDS in 2005 and the estimated number of orphans under 17 years of age is 97,000 (GOL/UNAIDS 2005).

The foregoing grim statistics has, nonetheless, neither deterred us nor blinded our vision. Instead, it has spurred us on with more resolute conviction and commitment to win the war against HIV and AIDS. We have embraced the “three ones” principle to guide all stakeholders in our national response, and integrated HIV and AIDS in key strategic national development agenda as a priority.

Mr. President,

To further demonstrate our leadership commitment to conquer the epidemic, our Head of State, His Majesty King Letsie III, declared HIV and AIDS as a national disaster in 2000. This was followed by the launch of the “Know Your Status” campaign in 2004 with public testing by the Head of Government as well as other senior public figures. At this launch, I was personally encouraged and strengthened by the presence of the Head of the

Catholic Church in Lesotho, His Grace Archbishop Bernard Mohlalisi, O.M.I, and the then Head of the UN Family in Lesotho, Scholastica Kimariyo. They both took the HIV Test with me that day. (In fact I let the Archbishop do the test before me, because I feared for my results. For, as Prime Minister, I too, am only human). Furthermore, His Majesty launched the National Operational Plan for the "Know Your Status" campaign during the World AIDS Day Commemoration last year. The "Know Your Status" campaign is regarded as the gateway to universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support services.

As an integral part of the "Know Your Status" campaign, the primary focus is on communication and education for behavioural change, particularly for the youth. The level of HIV and AIDS awareness has significantly increased due to ongoing public education and exemplary commitment of national leadership to awareness campaign efforts. There is an increased level of use of protective and preventive devices such as condoms. Peer education and establishment of adolescent health corners have been successful in influencing behavioural change and meeting the reproductive health care needs of adolescents.

Lesotho started providing services for Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV in 2003. As part of prevention initiatives, syndromic management of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) was also established. Furthermore, there are about 11,000 people on antiretroviral therapy of whom 500 are children under the age of 14. The main challenge is to upgrade existing health facilities, establish new infrastructure as well as increase resource allocation through active mobilization of private sector and external donor support.

Community home-based care and support has been the main pillar for those on treatment including orphans and vulnerable children. A large number of community and family level support groups have emerged out of need and moral obligation to those on treatment. This is a collaborative effort of the Government, Office of the First Lady, District AIDS Committees, religious organisations and several NGOs. The major challenge here is to equip these grassroot agents or foot soldiers with predictable and sustainable resources, and to give them an incentive in the form of a stipend. This would upgrade care from voluntary to accountable level. The Government of Lesotho, UN agencies, local stakeholders and development partners, have also joined

hands to come up with clear policies, legislation and strategies to address this situation.

We have also made headway in addressing the issues of human rights, stigma and discrimination, which are central to an effective response. A significant milestone was made with the launch of the Lesotho Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (LENEPWHA) in May 2005 based on the principle of Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV and AIDS (GIPA) in the fight against the pandemic. The supportive environment of the National HIV and AIDS Policy (already alluded to) complimented by the draft HIV and AIDS Bill, will ensure that the stigma and discrimination are dealt with once and for all.

Mr. President,

We have mobilized and committed our limited resources in our struggle to beat the pandemic. Our major challenge has been to provide adequate human, physical and financial resources commensurate with the magnitude of the problem and level of effort required to address the HIV and AIDS threat. Our efforts in building capacity, motivation and retention of competent health professionals have been undermined by the huge exodus to greener pastures in the developed world. Compensation from our meager funds is not adequate to alleviate the brain drain. Surely those in the developed world who benefit from this brain drain must put their money where their mouth is by helping retain and motivate our health professionals instead of continuing the unscrupulous haemorrhaging.

While we commend funding pledged to our plight from the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) and other international development partners and financing agencies, we however, advocate for "Pool or Basket Funding" as well as debt relief in order to make available adequate resources to fight the epidemic. We must also urge strongly that all stakeholders ensure that the funds do reach and benefit the target groups of orphans and the infected as well as the affected, instead of paying huge salaries of external consultants.

Talking about the debt relief in the context of resource mobilisation for HIV and AIDS, I find it inexcusable, if not sinful, that the G8 and others in that bracket have not yet deemed it right and reasonable to cancel debt for ALL Least Developed Countries. Sub-Saharan Africa is touted as the epicentre of

the pandemic. For instance Lesotho is cited as third in the world in terms of HIV infection prevalence after her neighbours Botswana and Swaziland. But we have yet to see a commensurate committal of resources in that region. It's time to put our money where our mouth is, to put or shut up. For, there can not be any economic development, or any technological development to talk about, UNLESS and UNTIL we subdue and defeat the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

Mr. President,

I heartily and happily pay deserving tribute to Secretary General Koffi Annan for mainstreaming the fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic in the work of the UN system. His leadership in spearheading the mobilisation of resources through the Global Fund, UNAIDS, the missionary zeal and efforts of his Special Envoy in the person of Ambassador Stephen Lewis and Mr Holbrook of Business Coalition, Dr Peter Piot of UNAIDS and other generals in this war are highly commendable. More often than not we come here to set loft goals for members of the United Nations Organisations but fail to walk the talk. Koffi Annan has pointed out the stars to us. Let us NOT see only the tip of his finger, but the stars beyond it!

I thank you.