



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

BY

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PRIME MINISTER

OF THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

DELIVERED AT THE

HIGH LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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New York

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Co-Presidents,

Your Majesties,

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, allow me to express our deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of the United States of America as they go through tribulations in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, and resultant in massive loss of lives and property.

This High-Level Plenary Meeting provides us with an opportunity for introspection, following the commitments made at the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, including the historic Millennium Summit. In my delegation's view, virtue has to command and indeed underpin our deliberations. This will enable us to meaningfully rededicate ourselves to the attainment of previously agreed goals, particularly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and also to strive to accomplish an outcome that will benefit millions of people that we represent at this Meeting.

At the Millennium Summit, we were confident that the goals and targets set were achievable. Yet, hardly five years later, the scourge of HIV and AIDS, the spread of which we undertook to begin to reverse and to halt by 2015, has widely been identified as a unique and unprecedented threat to international development. It undermines the hope of achieving the MDGs, by 2015. It continues to erode and wreck the lives of millions, particularly in Africa. Hence, my delegation sincerely hopes that this Meeting will give HIV and AIDS the same level of attention and concern as it does to global security. The Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change raises a question which quite often, occupies the minds of some of us who live in countries that are worst hit by the pandemic: "Whether international response would have been so slow if the disease had reduced life expectancy by 30 years in non-African countries."

Excellencies,

Circumstances compel us to reiterate our plea to the international community, to urgently adopt an expanded and comprehensive response to HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The response should include immediate supplies of the anti-retroviral and other related HIV and AIDS drugs as well as financial and technical resources for training and capacity building in HIV and AIDS Programme Implementation and Management. The international community must commit itself to the provision of affordable and accessible treatment including through the commitments made at the Doha WTO Ministerial Conference and those contained in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, those who have resources have to gather the necessary political will to ensure the full funding of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Excellencies,

Such comprehensive response would complement individual countries' intensive efforts to halt the rapid spread of the HIV and AIDS pandemic that has almost diminished our hope of achieving most of the MDGs by 2015. Measures taken by the Government to curb the scourge of HIV and AIDS include:

- Legislation and workplace policies to protect the rights of HIV-positive people;
- The establishment of the Lesotho National AIDS Commission;
- The opening of the Anti-retroviral (ARV) Clinics under the WHO '3 by 5' Initiative;
- The expansion of access to HIV care and treatment for children living with HIV and AIDS;
- Strengthening of the National HIV Laboratory Capacity, through the generous assistance of the Clinton HIV and AIDS Foundation; and
- Opening of a paediatric HIV and AIDS clinic.

In the field of education, Lesotho adopted a sequential strategy of introducing free primary education from Grade 1, in 1999. However, we regrettably recognize that the efficiency of the strategy is affected by a shortage of teachers due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic and the high rate of drop out of pupils, particularly girls, who have to take care of their parents, bedridden with AIDS related diseases. On a positive note, even though the future looks bleak, the

sector for future generations. Among other things, it has launched the NEPAD e-Schools Initiative Demonstration Project. The Initiative is intended to enable the children and their teachers to function in an emerging information society, for in our view, information is power.

Excellencies,

Regarding the target of reducing by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five, in 2015, UNICEF has correctly observed that HIV and AIDS has become the “chief underlying cause of child death” particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Our gains in reducing infant and child mortality are being eroded by the impact of HIV and AIDS. Preventable diseases also threaten the lives of children under five. With the prevalence rate of HIV and AIDS sitting around 35 percent, the health centres in Lesotho, are facing a crisis due to shortages of staff. In the same vein, the target of reducing by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio seems to be eluding us. Our efforts and resources in these two health areas must be doubled to achieve the set goals.

Excellencies,

Five years ago, the Millennium Summit placed at the top of the list of the MDGs, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, for indeed, eradication of extreme poverty was not only one of the cross-cutting themes, but also one of the key objectives of the previously held major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields. Unfortunately though, the goal of eradication of extreme poverty remains elusive for many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In Lesotho, about 50 percent of the people live below poverty line and about 40 percent fall into the “ultra-poor” category and cannot afford to buy food supplies. Unfortunately, with the adverse weather conditions that have been destroying our crops for the past three years, Lesotho is facing a food crisis which has exacerbated the havoc that is already caused by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. We are therefore saddened by the fact that WFP had to suspend food aid distribution in Lesotho.

The Government of Lesotho is doing its utmost to rise above the challenges it faces. It has among inter alia, adopted the NEPAD Initiative, and in July 2004, it voluntarily acceded to the African Peer Review Mechanism, which stresses high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated regional and continental

economic integration. The Lesotho NEPAD Chapter is built on the Lesotho Vision 2020 and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

Excellencies,

The prospect of further growth of slums and informal settlements in major cities threaten mostly, the developing countries. Lesotho has embarked on an Urban Development Services programme since 1989, which has assisted the urban poor with individual household connections with regard to electricity, water and sewer.

Distinguished Co-Presidents,

Regarding the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, the Ministry responsible for gender affairs, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and the academia, initiated a Gender and Development Policy, in 2001. The Policy addresses various development issues that impede women's full and active participation in development as equal partners and beneficiaries. The Government has also achieved significant improvements in the area of women in power and decision-making.

Excellencies,

Various measures that could address the development needs of all developing countries, including African countries, have been identified and the developed countries agreed to help. They have to set aside the conditionalities and abide by commitments they made at all the major UN Conferences in the economic, social and related fields and also at other international conferences held to address the special needs of Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. Furthermore, Member States have to rededicate themselves to protect the vulnerable and meet the special needs of Africa.

We have to face the truth. Countries such as Lesotho that in 2005, face a combination of challenges including, an the rampant spread of HIV and AIDS, extreme poverty, food insecurity and a heavy debt burden, will not be able to meet the MDGs, by 2015, unless sufficient and rapid assistance, particularly in terms of resources is extended to them. The stark reality is that Least Developed Countries like Lesotho urgently need resources to achieve these laudable and worthy goals.

Who can deny that a very strong link exists between extreme poverty and among other things, hunger, malnutrition, the increase in urban slums, environmental degradation, lack of safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation facilities, lack of education and even the spread of HIV and AIDS?

I thank you.