



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

BY

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PRINCIPAL SECRETARY

**MINISTRY OF GENDER AND YOUTH, SPORTS AND
RECREATION**

DURING THE

**FIFTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION
ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN**

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Chairperson,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you and other Members of the Bureau on your election. I wish to assure you of my delegation's full support.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Algeria, Tunisia and Angola on behalf of the group of 77 and China, the African Group and SADC respectively.

We welcome the priority theme for the current Session, namely: **“The Empowerment of Rural Women and their Role in Poverty and Hunger Eradication, Development and Current Challenges”**. Indeed, this theme touches on the core of our priorities. The rural poor, most of which are women, make up 70% of the world's population, one third of who live in sub-Saharan Africa. The challenges faced by these women include limited access to finance, gender inequities and inequalities, sexual and gender based violence, unpaid agricultural work and limited participation in rural development.

Chairperson,

This Session offers us a valuable opportunity to share experiences and gains made by individual Countries in empowering rural women. In this regard, I wish to share with you a few strides made by Lesotho in improving the lives of rural women.

We have enacted the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act in 2006 aimed at empowering and protecting women, including rural women. This Act provides for equal rights between spouses. In terms of this Act, women are free to enter into binding contracts, to stand as sureties, and access loans from financial institutions. The Administration of Estates Proclamation 1953, the Deeds Registry Act 1967 and the Marriage Act 1974, which formerly embodied provisions that

discriminated against women, have been amended. In the same token, the Lesotho Bank Savings and Development Act was amended to allow married spouses to open bank accounts in consultation with one another. Moreover, the new Land Act was enacted in 2010 which, **inter alia**, makes provision for married women to inherit land, and to have joint title to immovable property with their spouses.

In the light of the opportunities afforded by the favourable legal environment, women in Lesotho are now increasingly involved in development interventions in rural areas. They have established groups and networks aimed at reducing poverty. These groups also focus on addressing social, economic and political challenges. In this regard, they undertake advocacy for good governance and for equitable distribution of services at national and community levels; provide care and support to the sick and elderly; and engage in entrepreneurial activities to provide for their families.

We support projects on Gender and Energy in order to ease the problem of fuel shortage faced by rural women. To this end, a project on making paper fire rolls and dung cakes was implemented in the targeted districts. The Government has also embarked on the rural electrification project, with the view to answering the energy related needs of rural women.

Chairperson,

The Non-Governmental Organisations and Development Partners are critical partners of the Government of Lesotho in pursuing the goal of empowerment of rural women. With the support of Development Partners such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Government of Lesotho has put in place programmes and mechanisms to respond to the needs of rural women. These include, amongst

others, skills development for entrepreneurship, educational programmes on human rights, access to and utilization of sexual and reproductive health services.

Moreover, through the International Labour Organisation (ILO) supported project, namely, Women Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality (WEDGE), the Government of Lesotho assists women to finalise and market their products in food processing, grass work, leather works, textile industry, poultry, piggery and crop production. We support a project aimed at empowering young women and men to start and improve their small businesses by giving them start up loans. Similarly, we have launched an MCA – PEPFAR partnership that awards grants to women to start up entrepreneurial projects.

Chairperson,

I wish to conclude by pointing out that the challenges faced by rural women warrant a collective response by the International Community. To achieve our priorities, we require much more than the re-affirmation of our commitment to empower rural women and to protect their basic rights. There is no doubt that rural women can play a significant role in pushing the development agenda forward. But, they can do this only if they are empowered to do so, and if their rights are effectively protected.

I thank you