



*PERMANENT MISSION OF THE KINGDOM
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STATEMENT

BY

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

AT THE

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

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Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's satisfaction at the excellent manner in which you and the members of the bureau are conducting the deliberations of the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

My delegation aligns itself with the Statement delivered by the delegation of Sudan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Statement delivered by the delegation of South Africa on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Mr. Chairperson,

We propose to share with this august gathering some of the salient achievements and experiences including the gaps and challenges that still need to be interrogated by my Country in making a reality the equal sharing of responsibility between women and men including in the context of HIV/AIDS.

The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho has at all material times been at the centre stage at all relevant international fora wherein issues relating to empowerment of women and ensuring their full enjoyment of Human Rights were discussed. To this extend, Lesotho is a party to and has ratified a number of International instruments that seek to address gender inequality and enjoyment of Human Rights by all.

Mr. Chairperson,

The commitment of Lesotho to forge ahead with the agenda of gender equality and the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS clearly manifests itself in the strides She makes in ensuring that gender equality remains at the centre of all its development interventions, with laws and policies providing a platform for good practices and human development and security for all.

Informed by International Instruments on the subject in casu, the Government adopted a Gender and Development Policy (2003) which emphasizes and recognizes gender inequality as a major challenge to the

empowerment of women. Further legislative reforms were undertaken with the promulgation by Parliament of the Sexual Offences Act (2003). This Act protects women against all offences of a sexual nature and the penalties embedded therein provide enough deterrence to potential perpetrators. The positive impact that the Act has made on the ground cannot be over-emphasised.

Alive to the fact that the patriarchal nature of our society, has from time immemorial, defined the division of labour between women and men and the unequal sharing of responsibilities and opportunities in the labour market, Lesotho enacted the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act (2006). This Act addresses gender equality between men and women, equal reproductive rights and protection of women's property rights. Currently efforts are underway in harmonizing the Customary Law with the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act.

Mr. Chairperson,

The World Summit outcome Document, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 2005, reaffirmed that gender equality and the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all are essential. Further to that, the GA resolved to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination by, amongst others, promoting increased representation of women in government decision making bodies, including their full participation in the political process.

It is on the basis thereof that, the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho has made efforts to enhance women's participation and representation in governance and decision making structures. In the Local Government sphere and in line with existing laws and regulations, the 30% quota was by far surpassed with the result that women Councillors form 58% in the Councils. The Government has achieved 50% representation of women in the Judiciary, 41% in the Cabinet and 23.2% in Parliament. There are women in other high ranking positions including, the Speaker of Parliament, the Commissioner of Police, the Commissioner of the Independent Electoral Commission and the Chairperson of the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is common course that the responsibility of caring for those living with HIV/AIDS and those affected by the pandemic disproportionately rests in the domain of women and girls. This factor indeed limits the participation of women in other activities that men do. Lesotho has sought to address this situation by, inter alia, remunerating village Health Workers who provide Home Based Care. It continues to recruit more village Health Workers (female and male per community) in order to improve the accessibility of health services. There is also a programme on HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support especially designed for herdboys.

The Government is training traditional leaders and healers, of whom the majority are men, on TB and HIV/AIDS care and support so that they in turn can train and refer the infected initiates to health care facilities. Medical practitioners are also capacitated to perform safe circumcision. Moreover, the Government is introducing Youth Resource Centers in all the districts where young boys and girls participate in health issues which include HIV/AIDS counseling and Testing of peers.

Mr. Chairperson,

Enhancement of public support in the context of care-giving has been identified as crucial. Other stakeholders have therefore been taken on board. Civil Society Organisations are now principal recipients of the Global Fund. They no longer focus only on issues of prevention but have increased their coverage to include care services.

Partnerships between the government and civil society organizations working on gender issues have been strengthened and continue to grow. Currently the Government and some civil society partners, namely Women and Law in Southern Africa (WILSA) and Gender Links are nearing completion of a local government gender mainstreaming initiative in all local government structures in the country.

A training of trainers (TOT) has been conducted to equip a core group of trainers at national level to enhance institutional and technical capacity of the Government and Civil Society Organizations to advocate, plan, implement and monitor gender responsive policies and programmes. Moreover, studies on the prevalence of forms of Gender Based Violence,

assessment of institutions capacity and capability to prevent Gender Based Violence and to mainstream gender in their planning and programming, are nearing completion.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Health Sector is going through reform which primarily aims at mitigating the shortage of doctors in the country. This has resulted in task shifting which lead to the empowerment of nurses (women and men) to initiate antiretroviral care at clinic level. There are also Lay Counselors who do Voluntary Counseling and Testing to increase access to health care services.

The Government has partnered with Christian Health Association of Lesotho and the two have agreed on a subvention that resulted in the provision of free health services in church owned health facilities. Furthermore, with the assistance of the Clinton Foundation, the Government has negotiated low prices for drugs and laboratory reagents.

To address the challenges of the Health infrastructure, the Government has partnered with the Private Sector to construct a national referral hospital. The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) is also providing great support to the Government through, among others, building and renovations of clinics and supporting human resources for clinics. MCA is also helping to improve infrastructure for delivering safe drinking water in rural and urban areas.

Mr. Chairperson,

The current financial crisis has put Lesotho's economy at risk, and ipso facto threatens the achievements made thus far. This has affected jobs of those especially employed in the textile manufacturing industry who are mostly women. The textile manufacturers are already laying - off some workers and the challenge is to create job opportunities. To deal with this crisis, the government has set aside a substantive amount for training of entrepreneurs in business management to enable them to create employment. The Government has also increased the Old Age Pension by 50% to assist the elderly who are also the caregivers for the HIV/AIDS affected and infected family members.

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite the above accomplishments, challenges towards gender equality and empowerment of women persist. There is an urgent need to increase the role of men and boys in the household and in care giving to ease the burden that women suffer due to care and support. There is also a need to empower and train women to be able to sustain their livelihoods and support their families. The Millenium Development Goals may not be easily achieved if women are not equal partners to men.

The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho remains committed to gender equality and the advancement of women's rights. We are confident that this Session will provide guidelines to Member States in mapping out policies that promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including in the context of HIV/AIDS. It is of no doubt that women's rights are human rights, and are inherent and universal. It behoves us therefore, Mr. Chairperson, to call upon all women and men of the world to work in unison in the protection of the rights of women.

I thank you.