

**STATEMENT BY
H.E. HONOURABLE SENATOR THEMBA N. MASUKU
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF THE
KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND**

**BEFORE THE 56TH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**ON THE PRIORITY THEME:
THE EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN
POVERTY AND HUNGER ERADICATION, DEVELOPMENT AND
CURRENT CHALLENGES**

**27 FEBRUARY 2012
NEW YORK**

Please Check Against Delivery

CHAIRPERSON
HEADS OF DELEGATIONS
COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES
MEMBERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS FAMILY

CHAIRPERSON,

FIRST ALLOW ME TO CONGRATULATE YOU AND THE BUREAU UPON YOUR ELECTION TO STEER THIS IMPORTANT COMMISSION.

MY DELEGATION ALIGNS ITSELF WITH THE STATEMENTS DELIVERED BY ALGERIA ON BEHALF OF THE G77 & CHINA, TUNISIA ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP AND ANGOLA ON BEHALF OF SADC.

CHAIRPERSON,

THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND IS PLEASED TO ADDRESS THIS HONOURABLE GATHERING AT THE 56TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN. THE PRIORITY THEME FOR THIS YEAR WHICH IS “**THE EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN POVERTY AND HUNGER ERADICATION, DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT CHALLENGES**”; IS VERY CLOSE TO OUR HEARTS AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND IS WORKING TIRELESLY TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF RURAL DWELLERS, IN PARTICULAR, RURAL WOMEN. THIS MEETING THEREFORE GIVES US AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW PROGRESS MADE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND STRENGTHEN OUR STRATEGIES WHERE THEY ARE FOUND WANTING. IT ALSO ALLOWS US AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE OUR EXPERIENCES AND INTERACT WITH ALL MEMBER STATES REPRESENTED HERE TODAY.

CHAIRPERSON,

ACCORDING TO THE 2007 SWAZILAND POPULATION CENSUS, WOMEN CONSTITUTE A LARGER PROPORTION OF THE SWAZI POPULATION AND A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER (70%) IS RURAL BASED. SWAZILAND’S RURAL LIVELIHOODS ARE DRIVEN BY WOMEN AS THEY DO MOST OF THE LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT ACTIVITIES SUCH AS AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, PETTY TRADE, HANDICRAFTS, BREWING AND A HOST OF OTHER INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES. THIS PLACES WOMEN AT THE CENTRE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT. IN MOST CASES MEN MIGRATE AND PROVIDE SUPPORT TO HOUSEHOLDS THROUGH REMITTANCES. THIS PRACTICE MAY GO ON UNTIL THE MEN ARE VERY OLD AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE FAMILY GROWTH IS THEREFORE BESTOWED UPON THE WOMEN. IN THE TIMES WHEN THE MEN ARE AWAY, WOMEN TAKE CARE OF THE CHILDREN AND PROVIDE FAMILY CARE AND ENSURE HOUSEHOLD PROSPERITY.

HOWEVER, THIS POSES A CHALLENGE DUE TO THE SCARCITY OF RESOURCES.

CHAIRPERSON,

THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND HAS A LEADERSHIP THAT SUPPORTS RURAL DEVELOPMENT. FOR EXAMPLE, HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN MOTHER WHO IS THE LEADER OF ALL WOMEN IN SWAZILAND, HAS LAUNCHED SEVERAL DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS TARGETING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS. THESE INCLUDE A MUSHROOM PRODUCTION, VASELINE MAKING, AND THE MARULA SKIN PRODUCTS TO NAME A FEW. SHE IS CURRENTLY INTRODUCING A WOMEN'S BANK, IN SWAZILAND, WHICH WILL BE THE FIRST OF ITS KIND. THIS BANK WILL CATER FOR ALL WOMEN BOTH RURAL AND URBAN,

CHAIRPERSON,

THE GOVERNMENT OF SWAZILAND IS PLEASED TO INFORM OF THE MAJOR STRIDES THAT HAVE BEEN TAKEN IN POLICY, LEGISLATION AND PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT THE EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN POVERTY AND HUNGER ERADICATION, AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES.

TO ADDRESS THE DISPARITIES BETWEEN THE RURAL AND URBAN AREAS GOVERNMENT HAS COMMITTED THROUGH SECTION 59(2) (D) OF THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTION TO, *'UNDERTAKING EVEN AND BALANCED DEVELOPMENT OF ALL REGIONS AND IN PARTICULAR IMPROVING THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE IN THE RURAL AREAS, AND GENERALLY, REDRESSING ANY IMBALANCE IN DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN THE RURAL AND URBAN AREAS'* . GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO CREATED AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT THROUGH THE DECENTRALISATION POLICY ADOPTED IN 2005. THIS POLICY ENSURES THAT DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICES ARE PROVIDED AT ALL LEVELS. IT IS ENVISAGED THAT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY, THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE RURAL AREAS WILL GRADUALLY IMPROVE. THE DECENTRALIZATION POLICY ENVISAGES A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT, THAT OF ENSURING THAT NEEDS EMANATE FROM THE "BOTTOM UP" AND GOVERNMENT IS IN THE PROCESS OF ENSURING THAT LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES COMPRISED OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE ESTABLISHED AND SUPPORTED.

CHAIRPERSON,

THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND HAS CREATED WOMEN EMPOWERMENT FORUMS TO ENSURE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA. AN EXAMPLE IS THE WOMAN FARMER OF THE YEAR AWARD COORDINATED BY THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE WHICH REVEALS THAT WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR IS NOT ONLY PROVIDING LABOUR BUT THEY CAN ALSO FARM AND REAP THE BENEFITS. THERE ARE ALSO PROMOTIONAL COMPETITIONS SUCH AS THE NATIONAL MAIZE COMPETITION,

NATIONAL VEGETABLE COMPETITION AND THE ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR AWARDS WHERE WOMEN ARE ENCOURAGED TO STRONGLY PARTICIPATE.

WOMEN IN THE RURAL AREAS ARE MAINLY INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, WHETHER FOR BASIC HOUSEHOLD SUSTENANCE OR FOR SMALL SCALE INCOME GENERATION. HOWEVER, CHALLENGES EXIST WITH RESPECT TO BEING ABLE TO AFFORD THE NECESSARY INPUTS TO IMPROVE AND ENHANCE THEIR PRODUCTIVITY.

CHAIRPERSON,

THE SWAZILAND GOVERNMENT RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN AGRICULTURE AND IS IMPLEMENTING A NUMBER OF INITIATIVES THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE. THIS IS IN LINE WITH OUR CONSTITUTION WHICH ENTRENCHES WOMEN'S EQUAL RIGHTS AND COMMITS GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP THE RURAL AREAS. SPECIFICALLY IN RELATION TO LAND, SECTION 211(2) STATES, *'SAVE AS MAY BE REQUIRED BY THE EXIGENCIES OF ANY PARTICULAR SITUATION, A CITIZEN OF SWAZILAND, WITHOUT REGARD TO GENDER, SHALL HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO LAND FOR NORMAL DOMESTIC PURPOSES.'*

NONETHELESS, GOVERNMENT'S POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC EFFORTS IN REGARDS TO RURAL WOMEN IS FURTHER ENHANCED BY THE RATIFICATION OF CEDAW. NOTWITHSTANDING THIS HOWEVER, THE ABILITY OF GOVERNMENT TO DELIVER DEVELOPMENT AND EQUITY AS EXPEDITIOUSLY AS DESIRED TO RURAL WOMEN MAY BE CONSTRAINED BY THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES. CHAIRPERSON, AS I CONCLUDE, I WISH TO REITERATE THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND RECOGNISES WOMEN AS EQUAL CITIZENS AND HAS COMMITTED HERSELF TO THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THEIR RIGHTS. APART FROM CEDAW WHICH HAS RURAL WOMEN AS ONE OF ITS THEMES, SWAZILAND IS ALSO PARTY TO SEVERAL CRITICAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS, ALL OF WHICH PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN.

FINALLY, CHAIRPERSON, THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNISE THE IMMENSE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ALL OUR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS WORKING ON GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN FOR THEIR EFFORTS IN ENSURING THE FULL RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN SWAZILAND. WE REMAIN COMMITTED AND CONFIDENT THAT MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER, WE CAN IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY.

I THANK YOU!