

STATEMENT BY  
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AT THE GLOBAL PLATFORM  
FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION HELD  
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## CHALLENGES AND INTERVENTIONS IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN LESOTHO

Mr President, I am gratified to have the opportunity to give a few remarks regarding disaster risk reduction (DRR) in Lesotho. I must say, I am newly appointed as a Minister in charge of inter alia the DRR and this is still a new concept to me, although, as a medical doctor and a former Minister of Health and Social Welfare, I find it easy to understand and move forward with it, save for a few jargonistic hitches here and there.

Mr President, Lesotho is a small, high altitude, democratic country with a population of two million living within an area of 30,355km<sup>2</sup>. It is located in Southern African between 27° and 29°30' East and between 28°30' and 30°45' South. About two-thirds of Lesotho, from the North through the East to the South, is mountainous. Lesotho is divided into 80 political constituencies, 10 administrative districts and 6 livelihood zones (Northern Lowlands, Southern Lowlands, Senqu River Valley, Foothills, Mountains and the Peri-Urban Areas).

The main challenges facing the Kingdom of Lesotho and her people are:

(i) HIV and AIDS

The prevalence of HIV and AIDS is estimated at 23.2% (2005). This is a matter of serious concern considering that the population of the country is only two million. While it may not be a fair comparison and analogy to make, this situation is manifested by the following indicators:

a. Infant Mortality:

- Below age 1 - 91 per 1,000 live births (2005)

b. Child Mortality:

- Below age 5 - 113 per 1,000 live births (2005)

c. Maternal Mortality: - 419 per 100,000 live births (2001)

d. Overall Mortality rate of 25,750 annually

e. Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs): Over 100,000

Mr President, the above figures indicate a severe economic burden within in which more than 56% of the population live below the poverty line.

(ii) Poverty and Hunger

About 56% (2005) of the people of Lesotho live below poverty line of US\$2.00 per day. This is another threat to Lesotho, considering that more than 1.1million people are starving in Lesotho and only about 0.8million are barely surviving.

The big issue in this regard is that poverty and hunger in Lesotho are not declining, but increasing, particularly because the country is unable to produce a significant amount of its annual food requirements. In 2006/07 it was estimated that Lesotho would produce about 30% of its domestic annual cereal requirements. The pre-harvest crop assessment that was undertaken in March 2007 indicated a production shortfall of 40% from last year, which brings the estimated domestic cereal production for 2007/08 down to 18% and thereby increase the gap from 11% last year to 23% this year. This is based on the assumption that the commercial imports will remain at 59%.

(iii) Malnutrition and Disease Outbreaks

Malnutrition as assessed on children below the age of 5 years is increasing in Lesotho and that is a recipe for other diseases like diarrhoea. Diseases like TB, Diabetes and Hypertension are also a cause for concern among the people of Lesotho.

(iv) Unemployment

Unemployment is very high in Lesotho. It is estimated at 42.3% (2002) in spite of a high literacy rate of 81% (2003). This is a big challenge to the government and the people of Lesotho in general.

(v) Drought

Drought has been a serious concern to Lesotho since the last decade and it has been a major cause of poverty, hunger and famine. Most of our agricultural concerns are based on availability of rain, particularly

because as a country we are very poor in irrigation and other advanced methods of agricultural production.

(vi) Snow

Lesotho is one of the very few countries of Africa that experience snowfall. Every winter the country expects snowfall, which predominantly covers the highlands. The main problem is that those areas are the ones that provide pastures for livestock, which though decreasing, provides a coping mechanism for many people in the country. During the period of snow, both people and animals become highly vulnerable because they become isolated with no communication; and access to basic day-to-day requirements of life becomes a problem. We still do not have sufficient means to solve this problem, especially because our communications infrastructure and transportation networks are still at their toddling stage.

Snow does not only threaten communication and travel in Lesotho, but it also affects development and livelihoods, because it often destroy people's houses and kills their livestock and brings early frost, which is one of the biggest causes of crop failure in Lesotho.

(vii) Strong Winds

As one of the high altitude countries in Africa, Lesotho is also faced with a problem of strong winds that from time to time destroy people's properties and leave them in a state of desolation and misery. Examples to this risk are that in September, 2005, more than 200 houses were destroyed in a wind storm in the outskirts of Maseru, the capital of Lesotho and a month later most houses in the same suburbs had their windows shattered in a severe hail storm.

(viii) Trauma

The country is reeling under a high rate of traumatic incidents occasioned by road accidents that are among the highest in the world and physical assaults. This results in around 32% of hospital admissions at high cost to an already strained economy.

## Interventions to reduce disaster risks in Lesotho:

Lesotho is committed to the ideals laid down by the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) and it is pushing forward towards its implementation. It is noteworthy to mention that Lesotho passed the Disaster Management Act 1997 that provide for inter alia multi-sectoral working groups at national district and community levels. Lesotho has also developed the National Disaster Management Plan and the Disaster Management Manual to operationalise the Plan. At this stage we are working to make these documents compatible with the HFA. We fully appreciate the reality that disasters across the globe, undermine all efforts of development and that they have a tendency to worsen the situation of the most vulnerable among the communities, causing an extra burden to the tax payer. As a result of that, the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho is leading the process of changing the mindset to make disaster risk reduction a way of life in Lesotho and in keeping with the Vision 2020 and the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS).

Mr President, the Act referred to above established the Disaster Management Authority (DMA), which is a department within the Office of the Prime Minister. The Act mandates the DMA to coordinate planning, execution and monitoring of all activities of DRR. It established the Board of Directors and the multi-sectoral working groups at national, district and community/village levels. Of course the DMA has for a long time been more focused to the response side; but we are now embarking on the shift to being proactive as dictated by the HFA.

As a demonstration of commitment of the Government of Lesotho to the DRR, the Act also established the Disaster Management Fund to which we are committed to put funds that are intended to push the DRR agenda forward.

In addition, the Government of Lesotho has:

- Allocated 2% of the national budget for a fight against HIV and AIDS.
- Introduced a free primary education.
- Introduced an old age pension.
- Incorporated the private sector into all DRR issues.
- Introduced subsidies for farmers in food production.