

## STATEMENT

BY

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MINISTER OF GENDER AND YOUTH, SPORTS AND RECREATION

OF THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

AT THE

FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF

WOMEN

5 MARCH 2010, NEW YORK

Chairperson,

My delegation takes this opportunity to congratulate you and members of the bureau for your election to guide the work of the Commission.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the delegation of Yemen on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the delegation of Equatorial Guinea on behalf of the African Group.

On behalf of the Government and people of Lesotho, I wish to register our sincere condolences to the people of Haiti and China for the disasters that recently befell them.

Chairperson,

While we continue to be confronted by many challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the following are some of the significant initiatives undertaken by the Government of Lesotho to improve the status of women: the establishment of the Ministry in charge of Gender in 1998, the establishment of Gender Focal Points in all Ministries, Gender Technical Committee and Gender Forum. Recently, country-wide consultations were undertaken to towards the establishment of an advisory body for women, to provide for a coherent institutional framework to deal with women as well as the establishment of the Gender Equality Commission to provide for oversight function.

Chairperson,

Lesotho is party to international and regional instruments on gender equality and the advancement of women. Accordingly, she adopted the National Gender and Development Policy in 2004 to provide a policy framework in connection with sectoral programmes and also the Act for 50% quota in the Local Government Elections Act of 2005 as a measure to increase the representation of women in local government structures. Statistics of women in decision-making positions are as follows: Cabinet Ministers represent 32.2%, Judges constitute 45.5%, Assistant Ministers 66%, Members of Parliament 27%, Local Government Councilors 53%, Principals/Secretaries 44%, Deputy Principals/Secretaries 54.3% and Directors 56%.

Cognizant of the importance of education as one of the pillars of empowering women and girls, the Government of Lesotho has, in recent years, made basic education free, accessible and now compulsory to all. Enrollment has exceeded 90% nationally, with access to primary education achieving 92% for girls and 75% for boys. Government has also initiated a number of long-term learning and non-formal education initiatives to cater to the needs of the disadvantaged.

**Chairperson,**

Violence against women and girls, maternal mortality, HIV and AIDS and human trafficking pose a serious challenge to the Government. In light of this connection, we have put in place preventive and protective measures which include: the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act, 2007, the establishment of the Child and Gender Protection Unit within the Lesotho Mounted Police Service, a Gender Protection Centre to provide for integrated response and support services to survivors of gender-based violence and established a Child Help Line. We have also developed a National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence and conducted awareness campaigns in the context of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence and human trafficking. A Strategy for Accelerating Reduction of Maternal and Newborn Morbidity and Mortality has been adopted. A National Action Plan on Women, Girls and HIV and AIDS has been adopted.

**Chairperson,**

The Government of Lesotho has a number of initiatives aimed at restoring the rights of women and girls of the rural and poor areas. It is currently reviewing laws that are discriminatory to women. In 2006, Parliament enacted the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act, which removed the minority status of married women. Support services in the form of women's entrepreneurship skills training as well as access to credit have also been initiated.

In conclusion, I emphasize that the milestones would not have been possible without the support of our development partners and civil society organizations. We therefore thank you for their continued support for the betterment of the lives of women.

The Government of Lesotho supports the establishment of a Commission on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. We fully commit ourselves to cooperate with efforts and full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action initiatives aimed at the advancement of women.

**I thank you.**