

REPUBLIC OF
BOTSWANA

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STATEMENT BY

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ASSISTANT MINISTER
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HEAD OF DELEGATION

TO THE

**FORTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

ON THE

**10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COPENHAGEN SUMMIT FOR
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

11TH FEBRUARY, 2005 – NEW YORK

Mr. Chairman, it is my singular honour to address you on the occasion of the 43rd Session of the Commission for Social Development, and to share with you our experiences in implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and Platform of Action, as well as the challenges we have encountered in the process. May I take this opportunity to congratulate you Mr. Chairman on your assumption of the chair of this Session of the Commission and assure you of the full cooperation of my delegation.

The theme for the Botswana 2005/06 Budget Speech was "Meeting the Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2016 through a self reliant approach to Development". This no doubt underscores Botswana's commitment to the general poverty alleviation agenda.

Botswana's macroeconomic aggregates are relatively sound. The economy of Botswana has maintained the same robust growth level that it achieved since the mid-1970 when the discovery of rich diamond resources catapulted this formerly poor country into middle income status. The growth rate achieved during the second half of the 1990s was 7% annually. The fiscal situation has been generally robust with surpluses of about 9.7% and 6.6% in 1999 and 2000 respectively. However, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is threatening to reverse these gains.

Mr. Chairman, Botswana's medium and long-term development objectives are set out in three interrelated documents; Vision 2016, the 9th National Development Plan (NDP 9, 2003 - 2009) and the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction. Vision 2016 focuses on a broader framework and long term priorities; NDP 9 focuses on the medium term objectives while the National Strategy on Poverty Reduction contains specific poverty reduction measures. The policy thrusts of the plan are economic diversification and employment creation; poverty alleviation; continued maintenance of macroeconomic stability and financial discipline; public sector reforms; environmental protection; rural development; human resource development, including the fight against HIV/AIDS; disaster management and development of science and technology.

The quantitative and qualitative targets of the Government's Development Agenda are simultaneously congruent with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's). They aim to diversify the country's economic base by empowering more local entrepreneurs to launch viable business ventures and create employment. The actual pace of implementation of the investment plans and articulation of the production activities, mainly by the private sector could be constrained by skill shortages and HIV/AIDS. This is an illustration of political commitment and the existence of an enabling environment to pursue our commitment to reduce poverty and to create sustainable employment opportunities. We have made significant progress in implementing the Copenhagen commitments and are on track to realize the MDG's, despite the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Chairman, poverty is second only to HIV/AIDS amongst the human conditions which Botswana accords priority. According to the Household Incomes and Expenditure Survey of 2002/2003, the proportion of people living below the poverty datum line, fell from 47% in 1993/94 to 30% in 2002/2003. This is indeed a notable achievement. By and large Botswana poverty rates are attributable to the country's narrow economic base and relatively small and fragmented market. The country's 1.7 million population is sparsely distributed over the 582 000 square km of land and its spatial distribution limits economic opportunities since the majority of the population centers are small. Consequently they are weak as markets and are costly to service.

Mr. Chairman, it must however be noted that the level of income inequality is rather high, with a Gini-coefficient of 0.573, one of the highest in Africa. An important feature of poverty in Botswana is its high incident among female headed households. This is compounded by the high rate of unemployment among the youth and high poverty levels in the remote areas. The Government has designed and implemented a wide range of programs to reduce poverty. These programs focus on creating employment, empowering citizens to seize economic opportunities in the country e.g. through the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency – CEDA, and creating rural based social and economic infrastructure. In addition, there are social protection measures provided to assist citizens who are unable to earn a means of livelihood on their own.

In 2003, the Government approved an overarching National Strategy on Poverty Reduction as a policy framework which outlines Government's commitment to implementing anti-poverty measures, and provides a multi-sectoral approach to overseeing the design, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction programs.

Mr. Chairman, there has been a rise in unemployment rates in the past few years, mainly due to large scale closure of production firms, drought and limited Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as well as rapid growth of the labour force. Unemployment rates increased from 13.9% in 1991 to 19.6% in 2001 and to 23.8% in 2003. Worse still, unemployment is higher among female, accounting for 23.9% compared to 16.4% among males, while youth unemployment stands at 48.9% in the age group 15 - 19 and 38% in the age group 20 - 24.

Mr. Chairman, the Government of Botswana is responding to the problem of unemployment by developing a number of policies and schemes that seek to create job opportunities and to stimulate private sector investment. These include:

- Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA), a scheme that provides loans at subsidized interest rates, to citizens interested in establishing business ventures at small/micro level projects, medium scale, large scale projects and the CEDA Credit Guarantee Scheme for businesses with a turn-over of up to US\$1.7 million. CEDA also provides business monitoring and mentoring to address the problem of lack of managerial expertise.
- Joint Ventures between citizens and foreign investors
- Concerted effort through Botswana Export Development and Investment Authority (BEDIA) efforts to attract foreign direct investment
- Privatization policy
- National Master Plan for Arable Agriculture and Dairy Development (NAMPAAD)
- Youth Targeted Projects

Mr. Chairman, regarding support for Social Integration, the Government of Botswana is committed to the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all people of Botswana. The challenge faced by the government is to integrate the small population of people living in remote areas. In 1987, the Government introduced the accelerated Remote Area Development Program (RADP) in 7 districts, to establish permanent remote area settlements, promote productive economic activities as well as to provide public services so as to improve their quality of life.

Mr. Chairman, there has also been significant progress in addressing the other Copenhagen Commitments and Plan of Action, which due to time constraints I will not articulate in detail. Botswana has made significant advances in the area of gender equality. In 1996, the Government developed a National Gender Policy which prioritizes 6 of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action. At present, we are in the process of harmonizing our laws to attain gender equality.

I am gratified to inform you that since the Copenhagen Summit Botswana Government has made important strides in the attainment of universal and equitable access to Education and Primary Health Care.

Before concluding, I wish to acknowledge that while implementation of the Copenhagen Commitment lies with the National Governments, we cannot achieve this without the support of the international community. Finally Mr. Chairman, Botswana remains committed to the principles of the Copenhagen Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, notwithstanding the challenges it faces.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.
