



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

STATEMENT BY

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M.P.**

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DURING THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

OF THE 61ST SESSION

OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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SWITZERLAND

Chairperson
High Commissioner for Human Rights
Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. It is an honour and privilege for me, on behalf of my delegation, to join the distinguished speakers who took the floor before me, in extending my sincere congratulations to you on your election as Chairperson of this Session of the Commission on Human Rights.
2. We are confident that under your able leadership, this Commission's deliberations will be crowned with success. I assure you, Chairperson, of my delegation's unwavering support and assistance in the execution of your mandate.
3. Allow me to extend my congratulations to the other Members of the Bureau.
4. I would also like to seize this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Ambassador Michael Smith of Australia for his sterling diplomatic and time management skills, which resulted in the conclusion of the Agenda items of the 60th Session of the Commission in record time.

Chairperson,

5. This Session of the Commission on Human Rights comes at a time when the world is still reeling from the devastating effects of the Tsunami catastrophe in South East Asian and parts of Eastern Africa. The disaster resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. This resulted in an unparalleled humanitarian crisis in which there was extensive damage and destruction of property worth millions of Dollars.
6. My delegation wishes to convey, through you Chairperson, our deepest condolences to the bereaved families and Governments of all the affected countries. I wish to express our profound gratitude and appreciation to the donors and the International Community for their humanitarian relief efforts and for their speedy response to this horrific disaster.
7. A disaster of the scale and magnitude such as the one recently experienced underscores the urgent need for early warning systems to be instituted at national, regional and international levels. I am confident that with the kind of high technology available in most countries of the world today, disaster reduction initiatives could be stepped up to mitigate the effects of such major disasters.

Chairperson,

8. The Government of Botswana attaches great importance to the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights. To this end, Botswana is striving to meet its reporting obligations in respect of the various international human rights instruments to which it is a State Party. This comes amidst human resource, institutional and capacity constraints that the Government is faced with. We are, however, grateful for the assistance we received from the United Nations Development Programme, who helped us meet some of our reporting obligations.
9. Through this assistance, we have been able to organize two workshops on the reporting procedures relating to the Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. In this regard, I wish to reaffirm Botswana's commitment to the protection of Human Rights and fundamental freedoms.
10. It is important to note that these rights are fully protected under the Constitution of Botswana. Enjoyment of these rights is facilitated by a functionally independent and efficient judicial system, which accords every individual within the borders of Botswana redress and equal protection under the law and the Constitution.
11. The existence of other independent bodies such as the Office of the Ombudsman bear testimony to Governments policy of providing and maintaining a credible and independent grievance handling system. Other similar institutions are the Customary Courts, the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC), the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), and the Office of the Auditor General and others, all of which provide the much needed and important checks and balances to the system.

Chairperson,

12. Though Botswana has to-date not produced a single refugee or asylum seeker, it continues to provide sanctuary to many refugees and asylum seekers from various African countries. Through tripartite agreements between the Government of Botswana, UNHCR and the Governments of the concerned countries, we are able to facilitate the safe voluntary return of those who express the desire to return to their countries of origin.
13. One such successful voluntary repatriation exercise was done recently through the tripartite agreement involving the Governments of Botswana and Angola and the UNHCR, under which some 62 Angolan Refugees out of the 400 who had voluntarily registered were returned home. The heavy rains that are currently being experienced in Angola have delayed the second phase of the operation, but with the registration process that is ongoing, we still expect to repatriate quite a large number of Angolan refugees later in the year. We hope to start the next

phase around the months of May and June 2005 by which time we expect to complete the repatriation exercise.

14. Botswana also pursues a policy which is aimed at facilitating the integration of refugees who wish to settle permanently in the country. I am pleased to report that under this policy, some 377 Angolan refugees have to-date been granted Botswana citizenship.
15. The same goes for the Namibian Refugees who are also currently at our Dukwi Refugee Camp. We are encouraged that they are registering for the voluntary repatriation process in large numbers. It is important to note that this is also being done within the framework of a tripartite Agreement involving the Governments of Botswana and Namibia and the UNHCR. We hope to meet soon with our Namibian counterparts in order to try and expedite the whole voluntary repatriation exercise.

Chairperson,

16. This year's theme adopted by the United Nations with regard to the commemoration of the International Women's Day (8th March, 2005); namely, **"Gender Equality Beyond 2005: Building a More Secure Future, with particular emphasis on issues around development, human rights, security and disasters"**, could not have been more appropriate.
17. The theme rightly places a lot of emphasis on what countries of the world have done in the last ten years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. My delegation believes that the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms requires the active participation of both men and women as equal partners. To this end, we have taken measures to amend those of our laws which discriminate against our women folk.
18. In pursuit of gender equality, Parliament recently passed the Marital Power Bill, which sought to place married women on an equal footing with their male counterparts. The Bill enables married women to secure loans, land and acquire other property and also enjoy other economic benefits during the currency of the marriage, without having to get the consent of their husbands. It also aims at making husband and wife equal partners in any economic undertaking.
19. This development fulfils one of the key aspirations of the Beijing Conference, implementation of whose Declaration and Platform for Action in Botswana gave birth to the National Gender Plan of Action. The main focus of this Plan is the education and the health rights of the girl child, as well as the active participation of women in all sectors of the economy and in decision-making positions.

20. HIV/AIDS intervention programmes, rape counseling and family education target women and the girl child, because they are in the majority of cases, the victims of such social ills. To this extent, Government has found it fitting that expectant mothers should be tested for the HIV virus and if need be, they be enrolled in the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission programme, so as to protect unborn babies from contracting the HIV virus at birth. There is also a nation-wide roll out public-funded programme of anti-retrovirals for those suffering from diseases associated with the AIDS virus.
21. Chairperson, as part of an effort to ensure that our Constitution affords all citizens equal protection of their rights and fundamental freedoms, we are currently processing, through Parliament, a Constitutional (Amendment) Bill which is aimed at amending some specific sections of our Constitution which have been found not to be tribally neutral by the Presidential Commission appointed to, among others, identify such shortcomings.
22. Botswana as an active player in the global village continues to play her part, whilst at the same time trying to maintain and protect her cultural values and norms. The revised National Policy on Education is but one of the many ways through which Government tries to promote various cultures of her people. Other measures in this regard include the reviewing of the schools curriculum with a view to gradually incorporating other local languages. Through our Department of Youth and Culture, programmes have also been put in place to support initiatives that work towards promoting cultural values and norms of our population.

Chairperson,

23. In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm Botswana's faith in the viability of the Commission on Human Rights as an instrument for the protection of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law.
24. You therefore have our fullest support for your efforts to make this world a safer place for both present and future generations.
25. I thank you.
