



STATEMENT BY

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**MINISTER OF JUSTICE, DEFENCE AND
SECURITY**

OF THE

REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

**DURING THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE 4TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN
RIGHTS COUNCIL**

**12 – 16 MARCH 2007
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND.**

Mr. President

Madam High Commissioner for Human Rights

Distinguished delegates

1. It is an honour and privilege for me to address the meeting of the High Level Segment of the 4th session of the Human Rights Council.

2. We congratulate you Mr. President for the able manner in which you have presided over the business of the Council, and wish to assure you of my delegation's unwavering support in the execution of your mandate.

3. Mr. President,
The government of Botswana attaches great importance to the mandate of the Human Rights Council. It does so not to impress the International Community or anyone, but because it believes the mandate is inline with

the expectations of its own people who democratically elected it to office.

4. To this end the Government of Botswana is pleased to report on some developments in the past year aimed at deepening democracy and the promotion of human rights. Among these are, the further democratisation of our traditional systems namely the House of Chiefs in Parliament (known as Ntlo ya Dikgosi), which has been enlarged to take into account the demographic composition of the country. This development involved extensive consultations with all communities in Botswana.

5. The second development was the abolition of marital powers, which has afforded equality between husband and wife. This will go a long way towards empowering women in Botswana.

6. In addition to the two above Mr. President, Botswana believes the promotion of civil and political rights should be balanced with economic and social rights. In this regard Botswana is proud of its record of achievement in the areas of education and health, including the strides made in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The 2007/2008 government budget allocates the Ministries of Education and Health 28.2% and 8.9% of the national budget respectively. In addition, government has allocated sizeable resources towards programmes aimed at promoting gender equality and youth empowerment.

7. Like others, Botswana also believes in the universality of human rights. However, the application of this principle needs to have a context if the human rights are to be universally respected. It should be noted that

although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948, colonial systems for example, which were based on blatant discriminatory practices did not end until the mid 1990s. It has to be accepted that many developing countries are still grappling with the phenomenon of nation building, and that therefore inappropriate application of this principle can easily divide these fragile societies.

8. History has shown that Mr. President, in communities where there is strife, human rights become one of the first casualties. To this end, we believe that it is not helpful to impose interpretations of these principles on member states without taking into account their perspectives. There is clearly a need for extensive consultations based on mutual respect if member states are to interpret

human rights principles from a common perspective.

9. Mr. President,

While Botswana has no difficulty with the system of using Special Rapporteurs it does however have concerns about the conduct of some Special Rapporteurs in the past, which had the effect of rendering their reports not credible. Botswana has had experience with reports which poured scorn upon, rather than encourage its efforts to promote access to education of some of its disadvantaged communities. We believe therefore, that it is necessary to enhance the credibility of the system by putting in place operational guidelines for such Rapporteurs.

10. Our hope Mr. President, is that the new Human Rights Council will bring an end to the unhelpful finger -pointing and point-scoring

that had characterised the Commission on Human Rights in the past. We are disappointed that such practices still continue. It is our view that unless there is substantial movement from this conduct, the improvement we sought to make by creating the Council will come to naught.

11. Our other concern Mr. President, is the burden of reporting on the same human rights issues to a multiplicity of UN Bodies. We believe that there is need to develop a system whereby a report on a human right issue, for example, should be shared among all relevant UN agencies curtailing the present burdensome practice whereby member states are required to report separately to each and every UN agency whose work may require a report.

12. Finally Mr. President, Botswana has always been in the forefront in efforts to promote

the respect for human rights both in its neighbourhood in Southern Africa and the African continent as a whole. We are indeed concerned about the suffering of internally displaced persons and refugees everywhere, including Darfur. This is why we have made a contribution in our small way to peacekeeping efforts in Darfur. We can only call upon all those involved to take meaningful measures aimed at finding solution to the problem.

13. I thank you for your attention.