



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE KINGDOM  
OF LESOTHO TO THE UNITED NATIONS

KHOTSONG

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STATEMENT

BY

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PRINCIPAL SECRETARY

MINISTRY OF GENDER AND YOUTH, SPORTS AND  
RECREATION

DURING THE

FIFTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

ON THE  
STATUS OF WOMEN

29 FEBRUARY 2012

NEW YORK

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Chairperson,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you and other Members of the Bureau on your election. I wish to assure you of my delegation's full support.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Algeria, Tunisia and Angola on behalf of the group of 77 and China, the African Group and SADC ACP, respectively.

We welcome the priority theme, "Empowerment of Rural Women and their Role in Poverty Eradication, Development and Current Challenges". Indeed, this theme touches on the core of our priorities. The rural poor, most of which are women, make up 70% of the world's population, one third of which live in sub-Saharan Africa. The challenges faced by these women include limited access to financial services, gender inequality and discrimination, which in turn hinder their productivity, work and limited participation in development.

Chairperson,

This Session offers us a valuable opportunity to share experiences and gains made by individual Countries in empowering rural women. In this regard, I wish to share with you a few strides made by Lesotho in improving the lives of rural women.

We have enacted the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act in 2006 aimed at empowering and protecting women, including rural women. This Act provides for equal rights between spouses. In terms of this Act, women are free to enter into binding contracts, to stand as sureties, and access loans from financial institutions. The Administration of Estates (Amendment) Act, 1997 and the Marriage Act 1974, which formerly embodied provisions that

discriminated against women have been amended in order to allow women to open bank accounts in consultation with their spouses. Moreover, the new Land Act was enacted in 2010 which makes provision for married women to inherit land, and to have joint title to immovable property with their spouses.

In the light of the opportunities afforded by the favourable legal environment, women in Lesotho are increasingly involved in development interventions in rural areas. They have established groups and networks aimed at reducing poverty. These groups also focus on addressing social, economic and political challenges. In this regard, they undertake advocacy for good governance and for equitable distribution of services to the sick and elderly; and engage in entrepreneurial activities to provide for their families.

We support projects on Gender and Energy in order to ease the problem of electricity shortage faced by rural women. To this end, a project on making paper firebricks and dung cakes was implemented. Furthermore, the Government has also embarked on the rural electrification project to address the energy related needs of rural women.

#### Chairperson.

The Non-Governmental Organisations and Development Partners are critical partners of the Government in addressing the needs of rural women. With the support of Development Partners such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Government of Lesotho has established various mechanisms to respond to the needs of rural women. These include amongst

others, skills development for entrepreneurship, education programmes on human rights, access to and utilization of sexual and reproductive health services.

Moreover, through the International Chamber of Organisation (IC/O) owned project, namely Women Entrepreneurs Development and Gender Equality (WEDGE), the Government of Lesotho assists women to finance and market their products in food processing, grass work, leather works, textile making, soap making and crop production. We support a project aimed at empowering young women and men to start and improve their small businesses by giving them start up loans. Similarly, we have launched an MCA – PEPEAR partnership that awards grants to women to start up entrepreneurial projects.

**Chairperson,**

I wish to conclude by pointing out that the challenges facing rural women warrant a collective response by the International Community. To achieve our priorities, we require much more than the traditional one-time commitment to empower rural women and to protect their basic rights. There is no doubt that rural women can play a significant role in pushing the development agenda forward. But, they can do this only if they are empowered to so and if their rights are effectively protected.

**I thank you**