

Allow me first to pay my respects to His Majesty, King Letsie III,
to the Right Honourable Prime Minister, H.E. Thomas Motsoahae Thabane,
the President of the Senate, M'e 'Mamonaheng Mokitimi,
the Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Sephiri Motanyane,

To the honourable ministers and members of parliament, high officials of the judiciary, the Council of State, national and local administration and the security forces, representatives of political parties, religious congregations, traditional authority, ambassadors, senior UN officials and members of the SADC Oversight Committee,

I would like to extend a special welcome to H.E. the Deputy Prime Minister who is here with us and who has kindly accepted to close this gathering,

Distinguished participants,

I am honoured to have the opportunity to offer a few remarks before the closure of this post-electoral dialogue. I hope I will not be too long, as some participants yesterday castigated foreign influence as the main cause of the ills of this country. But let me assure you, my diplomatic colleagues and I, we are not here to lecture you, we are here to listen, to try to understand, and to lend support to this process where you feel it is useful. But the process is entirely yours.

For me as a newcomer to the Kingdom of Lesotho, this has been a very instructive exercise and we should all be grateful to the Lesotho Council of NGOs for taking the initiative of organizing it. I am impressed by the frankness of the exchanges, by the amount of goodwill from all sides to finally address the deep-rooted problems, by the determination to open a new page in the history of your country, and most of all, by your willingness to do so collectively and transparently. I

am impressed to see representatives from a wide range of state institutions as well as of civil society embrace this process and eager to participate. This is really a national effort, as it should be.

But I also realise that the challenges ahead are daunting. In order to overcome the recurrent political violence which has beset Lesotho for several decades, a sustained and sincere commitment from all sides is needed. As some of the previous speakers have remarked, there will be differences and disagreements, moments of doubt and hesitation, and the temptation to give up or to look for quick fixes. Brace yourselves for a difficult and bumpy road ahead, and persist with a clear vision of your objective, of "the Lesotho you want", as someone has put it.

After many years of recurrent turmoil, politically motivated violence and instability, you now have the opportunity to open a new chapter and lead the country towards a better, a more peaceful, a more stable future, and thus to lay the foundations for renewed economic growth and job creation. This is what the Basotho people expect from you, in particular the young generation, and I implore you not to disappoint them.

Like all countries in our closely interconnected world, Lesotho is faced with a very competitive economic environment, and new investments, new impetus for the economy, and more employment for your young people will only materialize if your country achieves a degree of political stability which, alas, it has not seen for a long time.

Excellences, distinguished participants,

This post-electoral dialogue is a crucial first step on the reform process. I trust that the principles adopted and practiced here during these two days – inclusiveness, sincerity, non-partisanship, respect for each other, and a sense of common purpose – will guide you on the way forward. The next milestone, we were told yesterday by the Deputy Prime Minister, is the multi-stakeholder dialogue in one month time. I

trust the weeks in between will be used for multiple consultations among government, opposition, civil society, and other relevant actors to prepare the ground so that focused, substantive, and strategic discussions can take place on the various pillars of the reform process.

The international actors present here, SADC first and foremost, but also the United Nations, the European Union and your bilateral partners will be by your side to see this process through. The presence of the SADC Facilitator, H.E. the South African Vice-President Cyril Ramaphosa, at the opening yesterday is testimony to the great importance that your neighbours attach to this process.

As you now embark on the next steps, let me share with you a few observations on justice, reconciliation, forgiveness and amnesty, which, I believe, are at the heart of your discussions. They are related and yet different, and it is important to maintain conceptual clarity about them.

Distinguish clearly between amnesty and forgiveness. Amnesty is a legal act, whereas forgiveness is an individual expression of magnanimity. Now, some may say that forgiveness has nothing to do with politics, and that state matters should be dealt with in a strictly legal manner. I disagree with that, and some of the previous speakers who referred to Lesotho's history would also disagree. Was it not the founding father of your proud nation, His Majesty King Moshoeshoe I, who forgave the Rakotsoane cannibals after they had killed his grandfather? Was it not this remarkable act of magnanimity as well as Moshoeshoe's diplomatic skills and his ability to seek reconciliation and cooperation that helped create the Basotho kingdom?

No political system can be stable without justice. But justice requires careful judgement. Sometimes, retribution causes or perpetuates divisions, and it is forgiveness and magnanimity that unify a society and a nation.

Also, as an Ambassador of the European Union, I would be amiss if I would not mention that the 7 decades of peace which we Europeans have enjoyed on our continent is the result of reconciliation; reconciliation among nations who had spent centuries fighting each other and slaughtering their neighbours in the name of religion or a by a misguided sense of being superior to others. It took outstanding leaders to overcome these historic divisions and to lay the foundations of our union, which has brought an unprecedented era of peace and prosperity to Europe.

Let me give you another example where forgiveness has played a crucial role in politics, and that is in post-genocide Rwanda. After this biggest human catastrophe in postcolonial Africa, the new government in Kigali was faced with a dilemma: There were tens of thousands of people, mobilised by the former extremist leadership, who had participated in the genocide and killed, raped and maimed. It was practically impossible for the formal justice system to deal with this magnitude of crimes; so a process was established whereby the culprits could admit their crimes in local councils, and many of them received sentences in the form of community service, or had to rebuild the homes of victims or work in their fields. The culprits could thus receive forgiveness from the victims, or, more often, from surviving relatives. These "*gacaca* courts", as they were called, have contributed essentially to the post-genocide reconciliation in Rwanda. And three important lessons can be drawn from them:

the first is that forgiveness is based on an admission of wrong-doing;

the second, that forgiveness is the privilege of the victims;

and the third, that it requires the participation of a whole society to achieve lasting reconciliation.

Excellences, distinguished participants,

Only truth and forgiveness lead to true reconciliation. An amnesty can be part of a process of transitional justice, but an amnesty without admission of guilt by the

culprits, and without genuine forgiveness by the victims, only perpetuates resentment, and it encourages the aggrieved to seek redress by taking things into their own hands. It thus leads to a continuation of impunity and of the cycle of violence that you have seen over the last decades.

Now, Lesotho is not post-World War Europe, and, thank God, it is not post-genocide Rwanda. Your situation is different and you have to find the right way to deal with your past in order to build a better future. You can draw inspiration from other examples, but you have to design your own process of reconciliation, of reform, and create a renewed unity. Listen to everybody who offers advice, but decide for yourselves.

And as a last word, since the majority of you, the Basotho people, are Christians, let yourselves be inspired by the Bible. The Gospel of Saint John reports that when Jesus was in the temple of Jerusalem, the scribes brought him a woman who had been caught in adultery. And they pressed him to pass a judgement on the lady, knowing well that the traditional punishment in such a case is death by stoning. I guess you all remember what Jesus responded: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

It is, of course, one of the most memorable episodes from the life of our Lord. He didn't say that adultery is right; he did not say that it should not be judged; but he ordered those who were pressing for retribution to first engage in introspection before they pass a judgement and proceed with the execution. I believe it is an episode worth taking into account as you move forward into a complex process of justice and reconciliation. "He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

Kea leboha.