



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

STATEMENT

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. MOKGWEETSI E.K. MASISI
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA**

ON THE

OCCASION OF PARLIAMENT MEETING

DATE: MARCH 2021

TIME:

- **Honourable Mr. Phandu Skelemani, the Speaker of the National Assembly,**
- **Your Honour, Mr. Slumber Tsogwane, the Leader of the House and the Vice President of the Republic of Botswana,**
- **Honourable Mr Dumelang Saleshando, the Leader of the Opposition;**
- **Honourable Members of Parliament;**

1. **Mr. Speaker**, let us begin our meeting by observing a minute of silence in remembrance of all those who have lost their lives due to COVID-19 pandemic. Let me thank you for giving me the opportunity to address Parliament. This is the third time that we are meeting within a year to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to take this opportunity to whole-heartedly thank all of you Honourable Members of Parliament for heeding the call.
2. Our solidarity during this trying period remains the greatest route to take if we are determined to effectively manage COVID-19. Certainly, this is not a period to jostle with one another or to be embroiled in unhelpful debates. The lives of our people are at stake. Therefore, I urge all of you to put aside political differences and act as a collective unit to help our nation through this pandemic.

3. I sincerely want to express appreciation to all those among us who have displayed tremendous support for many of Government strategies that have been sanctioned against COVID-19. Once more, thank you for your unwavering commitment and support.

4. **Mr. Speaker,** as you will all recall, under the provisions of Section 17 of the Constitution of Botswana, I declared the State of Public Emergency for the first time from 2nd April 2020 which was subsequently endorsed by this August House and approved to last for a period of six months. This House, thereafter resolved to extend the period of the Declaration of the State of Public Emergency by a further six months.

5. The State of Emergency was the strongest legal tool availed in our laws to provide sufficient legal leverage in disease containment and control. It also allowed

the nation to mobilize resources timely against the anticipated rise in the number of cases.

6. It is therefore my duty today to apprise the Honourable Members on the milestones we have achieved in our campaign against COVID-19, the challenges encountered as well as propose a way forward. I trust that we will have constructive and meaningful discussions which will help our country to pull through this pandemic.

ACHIEVEMENTS

7. **Mr. Speaker,** I am pleased to outline the following achievements that were specifically enabled by the introduction of the State of Public Emergency regulations:

- i. They gave the President the power to lockdown the whole country and to impose curfews to control the spread of the disease by limiting the movement of persons during the lockdown and curfew;
- ii. They prohibited retrenchments or dismissal of employees during the SOE, where businesses were unable to pay salaries;
- iii. They provided COVID-19 measures, such as mandatory testing of all persons at all points of entry;
- iv. They provided for the introduction of several measures such as:
 - requirements to wear face masks;
 - presentation of valid inter-zonal movement permits; and

- temperature screening when entering public spaces;
- v. They provided for the suspension of transport permits, limitation of trading hours, including the sale of alcohol and tobacco;
 - vi. They restricted the number of people at social gatherings such as weddings, churches and funerals or banned some gatherings completely such as workshops, among others;
 - vii. They suspended the right to embark on an industrial action, including strikes and lockouts; and
 - viii. Government was able to issue an income tax Order of 2020, through which tax was to be paid by way of quarterly instalments of 25 percent, with the remaining 75 percent payable at a later date.

8. In the process of implementing the State of Emergency, there was a noticeable increase in the uptake of Information and Communication Technology in both the public and private sectors.
9. In addition, we managed to fast-track, in the shortest time possible, the construction of ablutions in all public schools. We also strengthened and expanded our COVID-19 testing to include high output laboratory based Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing at six strategic locations across Botswana. Government has also deployed point of care rapid antigen testing at clinic level, and we are able to conduct our own COVID-19 genomic surveillance to better understand the variants that keep emerging.
10. These achievements would not have been realised without the introduction of the State of Public Emergency because the provisions of our Public Health Act cannot adequately enforce the above

regulations. In the absence of SOE, it should be noted that all other actions limiting the rights of movement of people were likely to be found unconstitutional. In addition, SOE Regulations could not be infused into any other Act through amendment since that would impinge on fundamental rights and freedoms in our Constitution. I want to categorically state, **Honourable Members** that the situation could have been worse without the State of Public Emergency.

11. In addition to the above achievements, an Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan (ERTP) of 14 billion Pula was approved to, among others, support economic recovery post COVID-19. Through the ERTP, an Industry Support Facility of P1.3 billion was established to assist SMMEs and medium to large companies with operational costs for business survival and job sustenance.

12. The Industry Support Facility is administered by Botswana Development Corporation (BDC), Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA) and Local Enterprise Authority (LEA). Government in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, has developed a National Informal Sector Recovery Plan whose aim is to revive the informal sector.

13. The Plan has identified two strategic goals, namely; Establishment of Informal Sector Facilitation Structures and Economic Revitalization. Implementation of the Plan has commenced and to date, about P13 million has been disbursed to approximately thirteen thousand (13,000) people in the informal sector.

14. Water projects across the country were prioritized, and to this extent, the hundred Kilometer Masama - Mmamashia project was launched in 2020 and is

about to be completed within budget and on time. This was done to ensure provision of reliable portable water in the Southern part of the country, where there is severe shortage of water. Government also provided water to ungazetted areas across the country.

15. **Mr. Speaker,** Botswana has secured COVID-19 vaccines following my address on 26th February 2021. The first consignment of thirty thousand (30 000) doses of Covishield vaccine, donated by the Government of India, arrived in our homeland on the 9th March 2021. The second batch of AstraZeneca vaccines purchased by Government arrived on the 27th March 2021. As you are all aware, we have started rolling out the vaccines to our people, particularly those above the age of 55 years. Meanwhile, registration for vaccination is ongoing.

16. I want to highlight that our acceptance of the vaccines was based on their safety, quality and efficacy. I must hasten to state that COVID-19 vaccines are evolving and researchers and scientists are still learning about them. Our only option is therefore to administer the vaccines carefully and monitor their effectiveness.

17. Please be forewarned that vaccines do not prevent one from contracting the virus, as other Flu vaccines have proven over the years. As prescribed by the manufacturers in the percentages of efficacy, the COVID 19 vaccines available may prevent infection to some extent and reduce severity and impact of the disease. This therefore means that we should not relax or abandon the current health and safety protocols until Government and the World Health Organisation (WHO) advice otherwise.

CHALLENGES

18. **Mr. Speaker,** while much has been done since the outbreak of the pandemic, we continue to experience serious challenges, which require our collective efforts as a nation to overcome. As I have previously mentioned, the rapid increase of cases across the country, particularly in Gaborone, Palapye and Francistown, has stretched our human and financial resources beyond expectations.

19. As at 26th March 2021 there were thirty seven Thousand Four Hundred and Fifty Two (37 452) local cases and five hundred and sixty-eight (568) deaths recorded. It has been determined that travel during the festive season was a critical factor for this tremendous increase.

20. Another challenge is the insufficient COVID-19 vaccine doses in Botswana. Further, there are no approved vaccines for all persons under the age of 16 years yet.

Therefore, this will delay the timely vaccination of all our people.

21. **Mr. Speaker,** it is unfortunate that there are still some people in this country who continue to defy the health safety protocols, as well as those who spread false information about COVID-19 and proposed mitigation interventions by government. These are among major contributing factors to the surge in the number of cases.

22. I therefore urge all of you to uphold the stated health protocols and to continue to encourage the people you lead to do so. I further wish to urge you to reduce unnecessary travel within and outside the country, especially during the holidays. **Bagaetsho, ga re sa dire jalo, mogare o, o ka re nyeletsa.**

23. In this regard, it is necessary for me to underscore that the spread of the virus and the attendant loss of

lives in our country should not be perceived as a sign of ineptitude and inefficiencies by Government. **Bagaetsho**, the entire globe is in dire straits.

24. **Mr. Speaker**, as I recently indicated, the domestic economy is estimated to have declined by 7.7 percent in 2020 and the fiscal balance worsened from the original negative 2.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to over 11.0 percent of GDP. As you all know the business sector has hugely been negatively affected, especially the SMMEs and Government is undertaking all the necessary measures to help the business sector to stand on its feet.
25. The emergence of COVID-19 variants remains a grave concern for Botswana and the rest of the world. The variants are highly transmissible, making prevention more complicated and unpredictable. As you may have noted, the most recent updates on AstraZeneca

have shown that the vaccine is safe with more countries using it.

WAY FORWARD

26. **Mr. Speaker,** let me reiterate that my Government has so far done its best to rise to the challenges of COVID-19 under the prevailing circumstances.

27. **Bagaetsho,** in view of the stubborn challenges that we continue to experience, we still need strict control measures in place to effectively address the pandemic and save lives. My Government is confident that the strategies which have been implemented throughout the State of Public Emergency, have served us quite well. As much as we yearn with nostalgia for a return to the old normalcy, this is not the time to let our guard down.

28. Our domestic pandemic scenario does not proffer respite from continued strict adherence to disease containment. We have lost lives, but we have also discerned saving of lives through our current strategies against COVID-19. It is way too premature, and it would be remiss for any responsible government to abandon the strategies that have so far saved the nation from peril.
29. Therefore, **Mr. Speaker**, I submit for your consideration by **Honourable Members**, my request to extend the State of Public Emergency by six months, in accordance with Section 17 of the Constitution of the Republic of Botswana, **from 1st April to 30th September 2021**. During the same period, a curfew will be in place from **8 PM to 4 AM**. During this period, Government may impose localised lockdowns to mitigate the rapid spread of the disease.

30. In conclusion, let me recognize our frontline workers for their unparalleled role and unquestionable commitment in our fight against COVID-19. Their resilience in the face of a pandemic is a source of strength for our nation.

31. I urge all of you to avoid unnecessary traveling across zones during the coming holidays to prevent the spread of the disease. All of us should make this choice and decision at a personal level, none of us should be reminded to make what has now become a life and death decision. Please remember to always wash hands and sanitize, wear your masks and maintain the established social distancing.

32. I thank you for your attention.

PULA!!

