



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA AND SADC

Maun, 10 December, 2015

**“EUROPEAN UNION SUPPORT TO SPREADING HUMAN RIGHTS IN
BOTSWANA”**

Remarks by Ambassador Alexander Baum

Head of Delegation of the European Union

to the Republic of Botswana and SADC

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

[Kgosi kgolo ya Batawana, Kgosi Kealitile Moremi

Member/s of Parliament,

District Commissioner,

*Representatives of local authorities, **still to be checked and revised***

Members of the media,

Representatives from Civil Society Organisations,

Borra le bomma (ladies and gentlemen)

and most importantly, all of you who have decided to participate in today's event,

- I am honoured and grateful to be with you here today. It is my first time to visit officially Ngamiland, Maun and the gateway to the 1000th World Heritage Site, the Okavango Delta. To obtain this recognition is a fantastic achievement by Botswana and the Government of Botswana. I am sure, this achievement is also the pride of the people of Ngamiland. This gives us hope if not assurance that the treasures of the Delta will be preserved for future generations.
- Today is a special day for several reasons. We have at least **three** things to celebrate.
- The **first** one is an anniversary: almost 50 years ago in December 16 1966, the United Nations General Assembly adopted two international treaties that would forever shape our understanding and consensus on international human rights: The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Eighteen years in the making, the two Covenants (as they are known today) along with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted in 1948) created the International **Bill of Human Rights** and set out the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights that are the birth right of all human beings. This is in short what we understand by "Human Rights" today, a concept that must not be associated with specific countries (like "the West"), but with humanity and our collective memory and conclusions from our history.
- All around the world people are celebrating with us today on the same theme: *"Our Rights. Our Freedoms. Always.* [placeholder Setswana translation] kicking off a year-long celebration and campaign to raise awareness on the Bill of Human Rights.
- *"Our Rights. Our Freedoms. Always."* revolves around the theme **FREEDOM**. At its core, freedom underpins the International Bill of Human Rights – freedom from fear, freedom of speech, freedom of worship and freedom from want. These freedoms are as relevant today as they were when the Covenants were adopted 50 years ago.
- Being here today I cannot refrain from encouraging Botswana to join the 164 other countries in the world that have ratified the Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, without which the Bill of Rights is incomplete.

- The **second** reason to celebrate is that our host and organizer of this event, NCONGO, will be starting up the Ngami Rights project together with four of its member organizations, ToCaDi, Bana ba Letsatsi, BOFWA and Thuso Rehabilitation Centre.
- NCONGO has, in strong competition with some 40 other organisations in country, successfully secured funding from the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. This is an instrument under which civil society organisations in over a hundred countries around the globe receive support to do work on a broad spectrum of human rights issues that have been identified as a priority in that particular country. So, this makes Maun part of a world-wide human rights community and I wish to congratulate NCONGO and its partners on that!
- The Ngami Rights project wants to take human rights to where they belong: in the community. Many associate Human Rights with conventions and complicated legal language for people at the UN in New York and Geneva. But what the Ngami Rights project wants to do is to break them down and show that these are real issues that touch our every-day lives. The project wants to engage citizens to reflect on some of those core values and what they mean when interacting with each other and with authorities.
- It is important to remember that as individuals we can do a lot about human rights every day, the human rights of our fellow citizens and our own rights. It is not **all** about government as a duty bearer. We can all try to think what we can do in order not to discriminate each other on the grounds of for example gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. Non-discrimination is a particular imperative for those who provide services in society, such as health, education and justice.
- We also protect human rights by not committing, supporting or keeping quiet about violations such as child abuse or gender based violence. Reporting child abuse is an act in defence of the Rights of the Child. Turning a blind eye on your neighbour abusing his wife is saying that you don't care about the right to feel safe and secure in your own home.
- The Ngami Rights project will also engage you in thinking about what your rights are and what rights you may not be enjoying. There are many threats to our Human Rights today. Many people are still unaware of their rights and the existence of the International Bill of Human Rights and these Covenants.
- On another level, globally, there is still failure to respect the right to privacy in the digital age, the growth of hate speech against religions and racial minorities, the clawing back of social and cultural rights in the name of economic crises or security, xenophobia to name but a few. We should all stop and ask ourselves the question "What are the most important restrictions on my freedom and my rights?"
- I think that the Ngami Rights project is in a way the incarnation of the famous song by Bob Marley that says "Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights. Get up, stand up, don't give up the fight"! I wish you great success in this important work.

- The **third** thing I would like to celebrate is being here together in what, I am told, the first ever human rights mobilization to take place in Maun and in Ngamiland. Please share our experience here today on twitter using **#HumanRightsDay** and put Maun on the global Human Rights Day map.

- In conclusion, I leave you with the lyrics of a beautiful song which we are all familiar with, which in my view also resonates with what we are here for today:

Tsogang! Tsogang! Banna, Tsogang! (Awake, awake, O men, Awake!)

Emang Basadi, Emang, thlagafalalang! (And women close beside them stand)

Re kopaneleng go direla (Together we'll work and serve)

Lefatshe la rona. (This land, this happy land!)

- PULA!