



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DELEGATION TO THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

*Remarks made by Ambassador Mr. Hans DUYNHOUWER,
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the Kingdom
of Lesotho, at the occasion of the National Conference on
"NSAs and Policy Dialogue, Experiences from Lesotho and
beyond".*

MASERU, 12 APRIL 2011

Protocol;

Let me first express my gratitude for your kind invitation to open this seminar. This two day conference on Non State Actors and Policy Dialogue underlines a common commitment. A common commitment to non-state actor development in Lesotho.

Non-state actors play an important role in social and economic development. Let me mention a few examples.

- non-state actors mobilise grass roots communities, including poor

and marginalised people;

- non-state actors help in delivering essential services and development programming;

- non-state actors are often in a privileged position to monitor the impact of government and donor policies and practices;

- finally non-state actors can be instrumental in strengthening the dialogue between networks, federations and coalitions of non-state actors in the dialogue with government, donors, international organizations etc. This is the subject of today's conference.

I am convinced that local authorities and local non-state actors can and must play a crucial role in development. This is also part of what we call the 'the European consensus on development'.

The European Union's activities in Lesotho bear witness to this. The Union supports non-state actors through various instruments. Moreover our ambition is to associate even more non-state actors in our activities.

I am therefore particularly happy that this conference sees the

participation of all concerned, including the different ministries, local and regional NSAs, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Trade Unions, the media and donors.

Allow me to say a special word of welcome for the colleagues visiting us from Brussels and London from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM). Last, but not least, a special welcome to the representatives of the Local Governance and Non State Actors Support Programme (LGNSP). This EU-funded project has been active since 2009, promoting decentralization and the development of the non-state actors sector.

The National Conference

We are here today to witness the culmination of the work done over the last year. We have seen a series of five seminars with non-state actors on subjects such as networking, the African Peer Review Mechanism and the European Partnership Agreements or EPAs.

Today and tomorrow international best-practice will be presented on non-state actors' engagement in the African Peer Review Mechanism,

the Cotonou Agreement and social justice issues. We are privileged to have amongst us leading international experts.

The aim of the national conference is to present the key policy issues and opportunities/challenges identified by the 5 seminars.

Moreover, there will be a dedicated session for local non-state actors. How can their involvement become more effective; what are the priority issues? This is an innovative process. It aims at finding new ways of co-operation between civil society, the Government of Lesotho, the European Union and other international partners.

Co-operation between the European Union and the Government of Lesotho

Before further commenting on this programme of the Conference, allow me to review briefly the co-operation between the European Union and the Government of Lesotho. Our co-operation is going well. Last year, EU payments to the Government of Lesotho reached over LSL 500 million; this made the European Union the largest development partner here in Lesotho. This year we hope to have an equally good year. Our co-operation has brought concrete results in

the fight against poverty, the road sector, the water sector, grants to thousands of OVCs as well as in local governance and decentralisation. We will shortly launch a new programme in the justice sector. This programme will strengthen the independence of the judiciary; it make an important contribution to strengthened governance in Lesotho.

The governance sector

The governance sector is an important sector to us. The European Union is founded on the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. While partner countries are in first place themselves responsible for determining their priorities, involving non-state actors and local authorities is a fundamental principle of EC development policy. We support participatory approaches. This helps in fostering ownership and good governance based on dialogue and mutual understanding.

Founded on the principles of participation, transparency and responsibility, democratic local governance is a key to making local public institutions more effective in meeting citizens' needs.

Decentralisation

Decentralisation, that is the transfer of responsibilities and the corresponding human and financial resources to regional and local governments can also improve governance. It brings the decision process closer to the citizens. In this regard I should mention that the European Union is built on the **principle of subsidiarity**. This principle, enshrined in the Treaty establishing the Union, stipulates that matters must be handled at the smallest, lowest or most decentralized level. It is an important principle in establishing the division of labour between the different levels of Government in Europe. I believe that this concept has also relevance beyond Europe's borders.

When supported by a strong political will, decentralisation is a powerful tool for enhancing democracy, reconciliation and social integration. It is for this reason that civil society and the broader set of non-state actors and local authorities are privileged partners of the EU. Support from the EU for these actors aims at better governance, participatory development, involving citizens through specific, often complementary, approaches. Local authorities are well placed to do

so, because of their proximity and local know-how and expertise.

The LGNSP

In **Lesotho**, the EU supports non-state actors through the LGNSP programme. The LGNSP programme provides support for both local government development and non-state actors. The programme is funded with an amount of EUR6.4 million equivalent to around LSL61 million. In addition the EU supports non-state actors by giving them the opportunity to respond to specific call for proposals.

The LGNSP is an EU-funded programme in association with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. Its objective is to help deepen democracy, improve governance and reduce poverty. This component of the programme is implemented by the Lesotho Council of NGOs in partnership with the South African Institute of International Affairs with the technical assistance of an international civil society expert.

The EU is supporting the capacity building of NSA through projects such as the current one on policy dialogue, but we also contribute to the overall skills development relevant to non-state actors; examples

here are training and skills development on project cycle management, financial management, etc.

The European Union also recognizes the importance of a dialogue between non-state actors, the Government and development partners. Although essential, making such a dialogue a reality does not depend only on the government's willingness to engage in such a dialogue. Non-state actors must organize themselves effectively; they must demonstrate their effectiveness as trustworthy, reliable, professional partners. Partners with a dual role: providers of services and "partners in dialogue". If we make progress on this here in Lesotho, the quality of basic services like health, education, water and sanitation will improve greatly; these services will become more accessible to those who need them most. By doing so, we will have made an important contribution to wiping out poverty.

This is a goal within reach in a country like Lesotho. A goal that we can reach provided a concerted and coordinated effort is made. An approach that encourages a policy dialogue with all key players on local governance, decentralization, provision of services in an efficient and effective way.

Conclusion

I hope that all of us, representatives of Government and non-state actors will seize the opportunity this conference provides. An opportunity to learn, to network and to identify concrete issues for follow-up. The Delegation of the European Union in Lesotho looks forward to the results of the conference. We will continue to support initiatives of the NSA sector where possible – not only financially but also in terms of facilitating space for dialogue.

Let me therefore conclude by reconfirming the European Union's support to Lesotho's efforts to strengthening decentralization and involving civil society. This for the benefit for all Basotho women and men. The European Union feels privileged to be associated with these efforts.

The conference of today testifies this.

Khotso, Pula, Nala.