

**Remarks by H.E. Dr. Michael Doyle, Ambassador and Head of Delegation
of the European Union to the Kingdom of Lesotho**

at the official launch of the **National Policy on Social Development** and
National Social Protection Strategy

Maseru, 4 February 2015

Lumelang bo-'m'e le bo-ntate - Greetings to all.

Master of Ceremonies, allow me to start by paying my respects to:

His Majesty King Letsie III;

The Right Honourable the Prime Minister;

Honourable President of the Senate;

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly;

Her Ladyship the Chief Justice;

His Lordship the President of the court of Appeal;

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister;

Honourable Ministers;

Their Lordships Judges of the High Court;

Their Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions; Heads of International Organisations;

Principal Secretaries;

All other officials and dignitaries here present;

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

All Protocol observed.

It is an honour to address this important gathering on the occasion of the official launch of the **National Policy on Social Development** and the **National Social Protection Strategy**. This strategy, which sets out a clear framework for social protection in the country, represents a major milestone towards the building of a social protection system in Lesotho.

Today's launch is a result of years of extensive consultation and collaboration. The European Union is very pleased to have been closely associated with the development of the strategy, through supporting the provision of the expertise to help

the Government to draft a comprehensive national social protection strategy. The EU commends the engagement of the Government of Lesotho in the development of this comprehensive and cohesive strategy.

Since 2008, the European Union has committed 22 million Euros (equivalent to about 300 million Maloti) to the area of Social Protection. The commitment of, and strong collaborative partnership between, the Government of Lesotho, UNICEF and the European Union have been key to the development of today's strategy.

In many countries social protection is one of the success stories of development policy in the early 21st century. Every year, more countries adopt a National Social Protection Policy or Strategy and new programmes are launched.

Allow me to recall some of the milestones that have been reached in the last two years, here in the Kingdom of Lesotho. One of the key social protection programmes, the Lesotho Child Grant Programme (CGP), which provides an unconditional social cash transfer, is now fully funded and administered by the government. The government honoured its commitment to take over 100% of the financing of the CGP starting from the fiscal year 2013/2014, when an amount of 36 million Maloti was committed from the budget to funding the CGP. Within the Sub-Saharan African context, it is a unique example of an effective transition from a donor-led initiative into a national programme funded by the national budget. The EU support has been fundamental in helping Lesotho move towards a comprehensive and integrated social protection system aiming to reduce poverty and ensure that services actually reach those who need them most.

From the EU side, our support has moved on from initial funding of the CGP to an increased emphasis on technical assistance and enhancing the capacity of the Ministry of Social Development to lead and coordinate on social protection in response to the needs of Basotho. Improving the capacity of the government, at all levels - central, district and community - to manage the CGP marks an exceptional achievement in terms of the sustainability of the programme.

What is also notable is the tremendous progress that has been made in the number of children directly benefitting from the programme. From the pilot phase that reached about 5,000 children, there has been a steady increase to the situation today where I understand that some 80,000 children are directly benefitting from the

CGP. Here I should also commend the great contribution made by our implementing partner UNICEF in helping bring this about - and indeed I commend their critical engagement throughout the programme.

The creation of the *National Information System for Social Assistance* (NISSA), which identifies and ranks vulnerable households in different categories of vulnerability, constitutes a significant milestone in the area of social protection. NISSA helps to identify and track households which need public assistance. Today, the system contains information on about a quarter of the entire population of the country. The vision for the future is that NISSA will be used beyond the CGP, nationally, as a single central registry system, for all social assistance programmes. A national database can be vital at times of emergencies and food shocks and other crisis situations.

Launching the National Social Protection Strategy is a commendable beginning. The next challenge ahead is to move towards the implementation of the strategy in an integrated and coordinated way. The National Social Protection Strategy looks at the lifelong cycle and at potential vulnerabilities throughout life.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are negative opinions voiced sometimes against social protection and the perverse effects of dependency. This has been debated in many countries and in many ways. Please allow me to quote from the *National Social Protection Strategy*:

“There is increasing evidence that social protection not only reduces poverty among direct beneficiaries and their households, and improves wealth distribution, but also that it underpins economic growth within local communities and conserves national fiscal resources. This makes comprehensive social protection an attractive policy instrument, not only from a social perspective, but also from an economic one. It also has important spin-offs in less tangible areas such as human dignity, social cohesion and political stability.”

We cannot stress enough the commitment that is required from all Ministries, and I would underline, from all Ministries concerned, to ensure that the strategy is implemented and that tangible and concrete results are reached.

For all this to be achieved, adequate financial and human resources need to be set aside and the necessary administrative structures need to be in place. The benefits of social protection programmes need to be set against their cost, whilst being mindful not to overstate the cost. Given the challenges of affordability and extending social protection programmes to all vulnerable people, it is important that Lesotho as a low-income country finds a balance between preserving economic incentives and increasing social protection provisions.

Also important for success is to ensure the inclusion of all core Ministries in implementing social protection strategies. Mindful that social protection strategies can impact key national outcomes, I would again emphasise the need for strong inter-Ministerial coordination and the integration of different schemes. Social protection should be seen as a means to achieving the objective of social and broader development policies, especially to ensure that services are available, accessible and of adequate quality. As highlighted during the EU-Lesotho political and policy dialogue discussions on 1st December 2014, I would again encourage the Government to set up a *Social Protection Sector Coordination Committee*, led by the Ministry of Social Development, which could usefully follow the example and format of the Water Sector Coordination Committee.

The Ministry of Social Development should not be burdened to implement projects and programmes on its own. Other Ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Forestry, to name just a few, are equally responsible. It is important that the action plan is endorsed at the highest political level and indeed the presence of the Right Honorable the Prime Minister confirms the priority given by the government to social protection as a response to poverty and unemployment in Lesotho.

Engaging Civil Society Organizations in the governance of social protection is also essential. A strong civil society interacting with government plays a key role in ensuring accountability in social protection programmes.

The EU is greatly encouraged by the efforts of the Ministry of Social Development to guarantee the Government's financial commitment. As indicated previously, the EU will finance a third phase to help further build up the governance of social protection in Lesotho, taking a system based approach aimed at more efficient and effective management of social protection and wider coverage of the vulnerable.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Development is currently piloting an Integrated Social Safety Net scheme under which three core social protection programmes in Lesotho will use the *National Information System for Social Assistance* (NISSA) for targeting their beneficiaries. This initiative, which is financially supported by the EU, will undoubtedly enhance governance of social protection in Lesotho, and can set an example for the region.

In the last few years, many good results have been achieved, but challenges remain. Having sufficient capacities and resources devoted to social protection remains a challenge which, when not met, significantly impedes progress in the area of social protection. Meanwhile, efficient targeting of beneficiaries is of the essence. Together with our partner UNICEF, the EU is committed to provide the necessary technical assistance to the Government to help have a NISSA database that is more effective, transparent and accountable. NISSA's core function is to stand as a system of targeting and management of social protection initiatives.

Before closing, I would like to again congratulate the Government of Lesotho for launching today this important policy and strategy, which will contribute to helping the Government address the needs of Lesotho's most vulnerable citizens. I would also note that, worldwide, social protection is likely to experience further expansion in the future. In so doing, I wish to reiterate the EU's commitment to continue working closely with the government and other development partners to support progress, especially along the challenging path of implementation.

Thank you for your kind attention.

KHOTSO, PULA, NALA.