STATEMENT

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. KELEBONE A. MAOPE
AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE
KINGDOM OF LESOTHO TO THE UNITED NATIONS
IN THE
THIRD COMMITTEE
DURING
THE SIXTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON
AGENDA ITEM 65: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION
OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN
(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children

16 OCTOBER 2013
NEW YORK

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Chairperson,

I thank you for giving me the floor. I commend you for your able leadership in guiding the work of the Third Committee.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered by Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and Malawi on behalf of the SADC.

We thank the Secretary General for his reports under this agenda item. In our view, these reports add value to the discussions on promotion and protection of the rights of children.

Chairperson,

Children are a priceless treasure, and as such, it is Lesotho’s conviction that the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of our children should be amply and competently met. In that regard, we, together with the international community, need to reaffirm our commitments to attain the outstanding goals and targets set at the 1990 World Summit for Children, as well as those set at subsequent United Nations (UN) conferences and summits, particularly the 2000 Millennium Summit.

Moreover, World leaders enacted the landmark Convention on the Rights of Children in 1989 in order to protect the rights of children as human beings and to assure them of special protection. It is, therefore, disheartening to note that despite the fact that the Convention on the Rights of Children enjoys almost universal ratification, the extent and intensity of violence exerted on children is on the rise. The need to put an end to violence against children, promote their rights and provide a conducive environment for their well-being and development is more urgent now than ever before.

Chairperson,

As a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of Children, Lesotho is committed to fulfilling her obligations under that convention. The Government of Lesotho has put in place initiatives geared towards addressing issues affecting children and their protection. We continue to strengthen national laws and
policies with a view to promoting and protecting the rights of children. In partnership with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Lesotho is currently drafting of a regulatory framework intended to further enhance the child justice system. The partnership is modeled and draws inspiration from the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Children. Currently, preparations are underway to sensitize stakeholders and the general public on the provisions of the Children’s Protection and Welfare Act 2012. We believe that this will go a long way in ensuring that children are protected.

Chairperson,

Lesotho has joined the global call for providing education for all. We believe that this is one of the pillars necessary for economic development and building resilient societies. We have made significant progress in enhancing the development of children and striving for attainment of Education for All, as well as achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education. In 1996, the gross primary education enrollment rate was 69.9%, with higher rates for girls than boys. With the introduction of Free Primary Education, an increase of 82% was noted in 2000 for both girls and boys. To a large extent, such considerable progress demonstrates greater investment in education on the part of our Government. Despite all the achievements made, however, Lesotho’s challenge is the ability to sustain this programme. We remain confident that it will be constant and extended to the secondary school level.

Chairperson,

The Kingdom of Lesotho strongly condemns violence against children in all its forms and manifestations. It is neither justifiable nor acceptable. In this regard, allow me to share with you some of the efforts my Government has undertaken to address violence against children. In a monumental effort to reinforce its commitments to the welfare of children and their protection, the Government of Lesotho launched the first-ever national Child Helpline in the year 2008. The toll-free helpline provides the youth with access to 24-hour counseling, support and protection services.
Moreover, the Government initiated the Child and Gender Protection Unit in all police posts across the Country. Through this initiative, children are provided with a child-friendly reporting environment that ensures confidentiality.

Chairperson,

The gains that we have made are at the risk of reversal as a result of the scourge of HIV and AIDS. This pandemic remains one of the biggest medium to long-term challenges we are faced with. Its impacts are being felt across all sectors of society. It is a direct source of the rapidly increasing number of orphans and infected babies, in particular girls. The extended family, which historically absorbed such children, has been overwhelmed, giving rise to a new phenomenon of child-headed households. Reports on the impact of HIV and AIDS on children in our country often point to the fact that in most families, children have become caregivers to parents, effectively keeping them out of school.

In order to counteract this, the Government of Lesotho has put in place programmes that ensure that children are supported and protected against this pandemic. With the support of UNICEF, a programme on community mobilization and the procurement of testing and providing medicines, under Lesotho’s new Strategic Plan for Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV, has been institutionalized. Consequently, a total of 81% of pregnant women living with HIV received treatment to block transmission in the year 2011, up from 71% in the previous year. It is encouraging to mention that through this initiative, over 60% of HIV-positive children have access to treatment.

Chairperson,

We are deeply saddened by the surge in human trafficking. This scourge is indeed a contemporary form of slavery. Children, especially girls, are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, and child slavery. We, therefore, call on the international community to do all it takes to rid the world of this plague. Lesotho finds it imperative that nations take charge and condemn these barbaric acts in no uncertain terms.
In conclusion, Chairperson, I wish to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of Lesotho to the promotion and protection of the rights of children at the national, regional and international levels. We also remain committed to the full attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and implementation of the guidelines preserved in the Outcome Document of the United Nations Special Session on Children.

I thank you