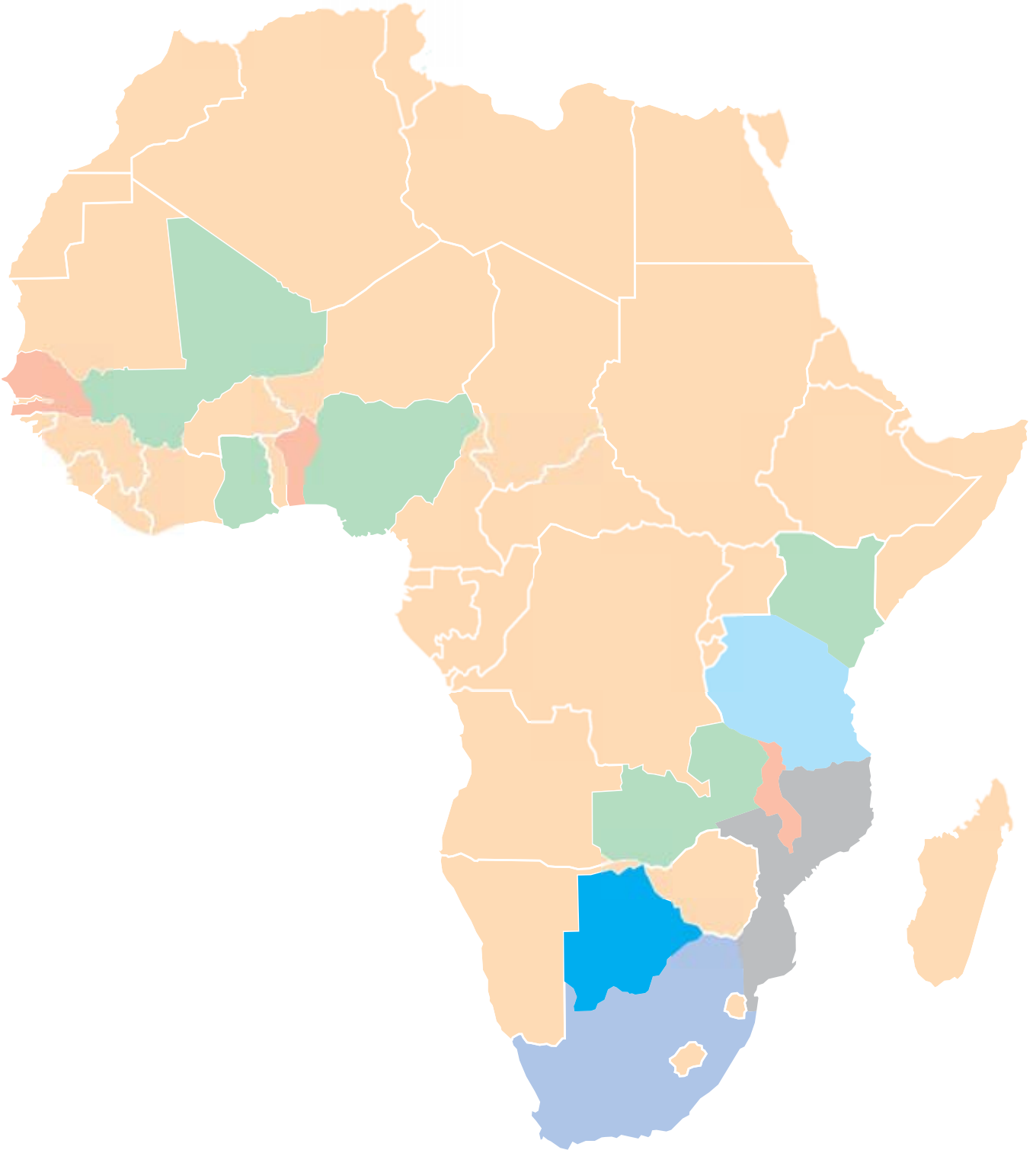


BOTSWANA



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**State of the Nation Address,
Renewed Responsibility, by His
Excellency Festus G. Mogae,
President of the Republic of
Botswana, for the First Session
of the Ninth Parliament
8 November 2004
Gaborone**

THE PEOPLE'S MANDATE

The presence of all of us here today is a testament to the deep commitment of our people to maintain a democratic and accountable nation. This opening session is the product of our ninth consecutive general election since 1965. Like all of those before it, the ballot was carried out in a peaceful, free, and fair manner. In this respect, we are indebted to the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and all others who ensured the poll's success, most especially the hundreds of thousands of voters who in many cases waited patiently for hours in queues to make their vote count.

As a nation we can, of course, take pride in our status as one of the world's longest established multiparty democracies, as well as the oldest on this continent. As I have said before, we are an indigenous, rather than emerging, democracy. But our pride in upholding an uninterrupted record of good governance should not lure us into complacency. In any nation, democracy will always be a work in progress, a means by which citizens seek to realise a more perfect community in an imperfect world. Our own democratic values must, therefore, be continuously tested, nurtured, and renewed.

The ultimate value of any democracy, moreover, will be judged by its constituents, the men and women who have given us their mandate to be present here today as their representatives. It is the electorate alone [that], by the casting of its ballots, gives our governmental institutions their life and legitimacy.

It is, therefore, to our voters that we must be responsive and accountable. In this broad sense,

it is they who lead and we who should follow. This ought to be seen by all of us as a great challenge, for inasmuch as the quality of freedom in a given society can be measured by its citizens' capacity to communicate, the value of its democracy is manifested in the commitment of its politicians to listen and act upon the public's concerns.

Here I desire to once again reiterate the point that I have made on previous occasions such as this, which is that the progress our country has undeniably achieved over the past thirty-eight years would not have taken place in the absence of a general consensus among Botswana about our national goals. I therefore once more take this occasion to say to the Honourable Members [of Parliament] that even as we have opposed one another from one hard-fought election to the next, we will nonetheless continue to travel together towards our common destiny. That which divides us both inside and outside of this chamber will thus always be less than that which joins us, for we are the representatives of a nation that stands proudly united in its diversity. Our differences of political perspective are a source of our governing strength.

CHALLENGES

On occasions such as this, it is also my duty to give an overview of some of the key challenges we shall face together, along with the steps this government intends to undertake in order to meet them. In so doing, I am mindful of past struggles and present circumstances.

We achieved independence as one of the world's poorest states, surrounded on all sides by racist and oppressive minority regimes. While much has occurred to transform both our country and region in the decades since, what remains constant is our circumstance as a relatively small and landlocked nation in a much larger interconnected world. Our ability to build a more prosperous and equitable society will thus be determined by our capacity to meet external as well as internal challenges. This will call for both change and continuity, for greater self-reliance and partnership.

Let us together here also humbly recognise that, notwithstanding the assertions of some, we are not as yet a "rich country." By any reasonable measure of our income and assets—human and material—we are still very much a developing society located within a still marginalised, as well as developing, continent.

AN EVOLUTIONARY STATE

A recent article entitled "Lessons from Botswana's Development" (by a certain Ugandan commentator, Kintu Nyago) described our first president as "a person with a remarkable sense of political morality and a vision for his people" who, nonetheless, "believed in evolutionary rather than revolutionary methods." These are, I believe, true attributes that have [guided] and should continue to guide us as we seek to build upon the legacy of Sir Seretse Khama, as well as Sir Ketumile Masire and the other visionary founders of our republic.

Evolution is defined as adapting to change. Given that society itself is ever changing, an evolutionary state can never be stagnant. In this respect, an evolutionary state is neither conservative nor radical in its tendency. An evolutionary state can rather be identified by its dynamic capacity to respond to the needs and legitimate expectations of its citizens. That is the fundamental challenge that faces this Parliament, as it has been for the eight [that] preceded it.

A FOUNDATION OF PROGRESS

In meeting the evolving challenges of the next five years, we also have the advantage of building on the progress of the last half decade. Notwithstanding the adverse impact of both the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the relative depreciation in the per-carat value of our diamond exports, our nation has continued to move forward. With respect to our diamond revenues, whereas in 2002 we earned P11.17 billion for 28.3 million carats, in 2003 we earned only P10.46 billion for 30.4 million carats. In other words, although we increased our carat produc-

tion by 7.4 percent, we suffered a drop in revenue of P710 million! Taken together, these reverses have resulted in lower overall levels of economic growth, [in] the diversion of public funds from otherwise deserving projects, and [in] budgetary constraints. Our economy, however, still grew, resulting in a rise in GDP [gross domestic product] per capita of over 50 percent, from P13,400 per annum in 1999 to P20,500 by 2003.

Over the past five years, we have also reduced inflation despite a sharp rise in the cost of such critical imports as petroleum. In this context, our country achieved increasing international recognition as a model of sound macroeconomic management and competitiveness, as well as democratic good governance.

The latest employment figures, from the 2002–2003 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), indicate a net increase of nine thousand jobs over the previous year. But unemployment remains a critical challenge. As a result of the weak performance of the nonmining sectors of the economy, coupled with a higher rate of increase in the total labour force, unemployment also rose to just above 20 percent.

Fortunately, the immediate outlook for the economy is satisfactory. The projected growth rate for the current year is 5.4 percent, which is in line with the annual average growth rate of 5.5 percent per annum envisaged during [the] NDP 9 [ninth National Development Plan]. It is anticipated that most of this growth will come from sectors other than mining and government, which is a welcome indication that our diversification efforts may be taking root. The key contributors to growth in the nonmining sectors are expected to be manufacturing, utilities, construction, trade, and transport, which are each expected to record growth rates ranging between 6 percent and 9 percent.

IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE

Over the past five years, the nation's social services and physical infrastructure have also expanded. Rural as well as urban electrification increased by

nearly 40 percent. As of today, over a third of our rural population has electricity, [and] another third has access to it. Our goal remains 100 percent coverage.

During the same period, the number of private water connections increased by over one-third. Having brought water to our people, we look forward to the day when all our people will have water in their homes, as is already the case for two-thirds of our urban population. Schools, health facilities, and road networks were also built and expanded.

Here let me pause to note that even such progress has its potential pitfalls. As [we] are undoubtedly already aware, the water levels in many of our dams are now quite low. It is, therefore, necessary here for me to remind the public that water is a scarce resource. All should exercise restraint in their water usage.

Notwithstanding the ignorant and/or malicious comments of some external critics, we can take special pride in the progress of our Remote Areas Development Programme [RADP]. By 2003, for example, educational enrolment among Basarwa and other remote-area dwellers already stood at over 16,500 at primary, 3,500 at secondary, and 300 at tertiary level. This is strong evidence that these communities, too, are now beginning to truly enjoy the benefits of our national development.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION

During the life of the last Parliament, our country experienced what a recent United Nations report has lauded as a telecommunications revolution (and here the appropriate word is indeed revolution, not evolution!). During the period, our overall teledensity increased from less than 8 percent to over 40 percent, largely, though not entirely, as the result of the rapid spread of cell phones. We have thus created a situation in which there is now nearly one phone for every two citizens.

The rapid expansion of modern telecommunications has opened new opportunities for further growth driven by the productive application of

new information and communications technologies (ICTs). Some of these prospects are likely to be explored next year, when we will host the Second World Information Technology Forum 2005 (WITFOR), which will seek to achieve international consensus on a concrete plan of action to help bridge the global digital divide.

EXPANDING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

During the Eighth Parliament, the Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprise (SMME) and Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA) schemes were also introduced, which have directly assisted some 23,000 Batswana. To further facilitate the development of local entrepreneurship by March 2005, a total of eight SMME pilot clusters will be established in order to encourage cooperation, productivity through internal competition, and economies of scale. An example of this is a group of twenty women in Thamaga who have already come together to form their own clothing company. Similar initiatives are currently being piloted in other communities. These self-help ventures can go a long way in helping us [to] realise our citizen empowerment objectives at the grass roots. As the philosopher Demosthenes said over two thousand years ago: “Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises.”

The last Parliament also passed new company, trade, and liquor acts to facilitate further business expansion, while the Botswana Export Development and Investment Authority intensified efforts to promote trade and facilitate foreign direct investment.

To further promote sustainable rural development through commercial agriculture, the National Master Plan for Arable Agriculture and Dairy Development (NAMPAADD) was successfully launched.

RENEWED RESPONSIBILITY

Parliament has a renewed responsibility in these difficult and challenging times to promote the

further evolution in our society towards its long-term year-2016 ideals through meaningful legislative action.

For its part, my own party has made a number of commitments for the life of this Parliament. I am here to affirm that these are promises that my government intends to honour. At the same time, we shall continue to welcome constructive input from the members of our loyal opposition, as well as [from] all others.

Let us together recognise and appreciate that there are indeed significant obstacles in the path of our Vision 2016 that will have to be overcome over the next five years. In particular, we all recognize that there are three major interrelated challenges that continue to stand in our way, namely high levels of poverty, unemployment, and HIV/AIDS prevalence.

ALLEVIATING POVERTY

[Although] we have succeeded in significantly reducing the number of those living below the poverty datum-line levels—from 59 percent in 1986, to 47 percent in 1994, to 36 percent in 2001, to our latest 2003 estimate of 30 percent—the fact remains that we are still far from our goal of fully eliminating poverty, which along with halting the spread of HIV, remains our top priority. In this respect we in government are committed to keeping our promise to expedite the implementation of the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and newly approved Rural Development Policy.

In this regard, efforts have been initiated to strengthen the institutional framework for overseeing, coordinating, and monitoring poverty-related initiatives. As part of these initiatives, a Multisectoral Committee on Poverty Reduction, comprising representation from both within and outside government, was established. The committee is expected to submit a comprehensive progress report on the implementation of the poverty strategy next month. In addition, early in 2005 a poverty reduction programme’s advisor will be attached to the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning to work with other min-

istries and stakeholders to help them sharpen the antipoverty components of their programmes.

It should also be understood that the majority of projects and programmes in NDP 9 directly contributes to poverty reduction and improved welfare for Botswana. The effective implementation of NDP 9 projects and programmes is, therefore, central to the goal of eradicating poverty. We are further committed to expanding educational and employment-creation opportunities targeting our youth, who are currently encountering the greatest difficulty in finding sufficient employment opportunities.

ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

I wish to here underscore the point I made at our university's most recent graduation ceremony, which is that providing jobs and overcoming poverty are burdens that cannot be carried by government alone. In today's market-driven world, it is expected, indeed necessary, for individuals to find opportunities for growth and profit by successfully competing with the best in the world.

In other words, the international accolades that we continue to receive in terms of good governance and competitiveness in the public sector should now be matched by world-class performance in the private sector. But our entrepreneurs, both existing and aspirant, will not succeed if they cling to public incentives at the expense of private innovation.

This government has been and remains committed to the economic empowerment of Botswana. But our best endeavours in this respect will achieve little or nothing if the beneficiaries of such initiatives as CEDA, SMME, and NAM-PAADD do not commit themselves to appropriately capitalise on government's considerable capital commitments. Those who have benefited from the allocation of public resources have a public as well as [a] private responsibility to work hard for the sustained success of their enterprises.

Of course, in business there will always be an element of risk. It is in the nature of things that even with the best of efforts, some businesses fail.

But it must be understood that as a country we cannot afford to commit public funds to those who are themselves less than fully committed to the management of their commercial endeavours. It has been said that while true leaders are "people who do the right thing," good managers are "people who do things right." This ought to be the basis for a division of economic responsibility between politicians and private entrepreneurs.

On the eve of the just-concluded general election, I informed the nation that my government will not resort to telling the citizens of this country what they may want to hear at the expense of what they need to know. As Polonius advised his son Laertes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "This above all: to thine own self be true. And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man."

It is my earnest hope that [we] will honestly reflect on what has and has not worked in the past. Over the years it has often been the case that government assistance—provided in the form of subsidies and outright grants, as well as low-interest loans—has failed. Perhaps this is because, as Polonius also warned Laertes, excessive "borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry." Our economy can only grow and diversify on a sustained basis if we move away from an overreliance on the state in favour of a greater degree of self-reliance by our private sector.

A dynamic globalising world requires equally dynamic local approaches. Here I wish to take this opportunity to once more suggest that it is our educated, informed youth who, in particular, have the energy and capacity to move us forward. The private sector can and must also make a greater commitment to local hiring and on-the-job training. An alleged lack of skills should not become a perpetual excuse for us to fail to meet our goal of realising a productive and prosperous nation for all our citizens.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

For government, the challenge remains to do all that can be reasonably done in order to create an enabling environment for further investment in

our human, as well as material, resources. This commitment dovetails with our continued determination to promote a better-educated and more-informed nation by ensuring that:

- access from junior to senior secondary school becomes universal by the time of the tenth National Development Plan;
- opportunities for tertiary education are increased through the expansion of our existing University of Botswana [and] the building of a new second university whose curriculum will focus on science and technology, as well as a medical school;
- the provision of high-quality technical education and training continues to improve in order to produce a more competent and innovative labour force that can drive socio-economic and technological development;
- increased training opportunities are also created for our out-of-school youth and people already in employment but wishing to still better themselves by the strengthening of open, distance, and electronic learning; and
- our curricula at all levels continues to infuse life skills such as computer literacy, reproductive health, and environmental awareness in order to produce well-rounded learners capable of adapting to the changing needs of society.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

The creation of more job opportunities will also continue to demand that we in government ensure that Botswana has the material infrastructure as well as [the] human resources to compete for global markets and investment. Last year, I noted our commitment to ultimately spend an estimated total of P600 million in the upgrading of our national telecommunications network to provide high-capacity international connectivity. We must move forward with this initiative, along with the continued rollout of modern telecommunications access, including Internet connectivity, to rural areas through our Nteletsa programme.

In addition, this government remains committed to the formulation of a comprehensive research, science, and technology plan to further develop our local capacity to adapt [to] and use new technologies in our drive for greater economic diversification.

ENHANCING COMPETITIVENESS

Notwithstanding the many international accolades we continue to receive in such areas as fiscal management and competitiveness, we shall also continue to review our existing laws, regulations, and policies, and where it is appropriate, [to] formulate new ones in order to further foster an enabling environment for citizen as well as foreign direct investment.

To help carry this process forward, government has reviewed the Revised National Policy on Incomes, Employment, Prices, and Profits with the objective of aligning Incomes Policy with best international practice, as well as Vision 2016. The new revised policy, which we expect to adopt next year, should go a long way in enhancing private-sector development.

To further enhance our competitiveness, the National Employment, Manpower, and Incomes Council (NEMIC) has been expanded and reconstituted under the chairmanship of the minister of Trade and Industry. The council is in the process of collecting strategic and action plans from all affected stakeholders, with the goal of presenting a comprehensive progress report to [the] Cabinet early next year, with follow-up reporting thereafter on a quarterly basis. This effort has been complemented by the ministry's drafting of a new Foreign Direct Investment strategy that, in the coming year, should be complemented by new legislation.

Additional steps to be urgently undertaken to further enhance our enabling environment for private-sector development will include the:

- submission of a new Copyright and Neighbouring Rights Bill;
- presentation of a new Competition Policy;
- continued support for multilateral negotia-

tions to establish free-trade agreements between SACU [South African Customs Union] and major world markets, such as the European Union, [the] USA [United States of America], and Mercosur states, as well as parallel initiatives through our participation in trade talks involving the ACP [African, Caribbean, and Pacific states] and SADC [South African Development Community];

- further expansion in the number of local companies with approved quality-assurance standards, certified by the Botswana Bureau of Standards; and
- formulation of a new National Programme for Capacity Building, which will look into such issues as trade capacity.

During the life of this Parliament, we shall also move forward with the implementation of our Privatisation Policy. A privatisation master plan is now being finalised for government's consideration, which will outline the criteria and processes that will be followed in the privatising of public enterprises, contracting out of services, and divestiture.

MIDTERM REVIEW OF NDP 9

As you are aware, we are almost midway through the implementation of the ninth National Development Plan (NDP 9), and, as usual, this is the time we need to step back and review progress towards achieving the plan's objectives. The preparation process will start in earnest in March 2005. The intention is to submit the draft [of the] midterm review of [the] NDP 9 document for discussion during the November 2005 session of Parliament. I would like to impress upon Honourable Members the need for consultation with their constituents on this process to ensure that the outcome reflects the nation's realistic aspirations.

In the context of some of the challenges I have already outlined, [we] should also remain mindful of the need to continue along the path of financial discipline. Besides pursuing revenue-

raising measures such as cost recovery, we must also endeavour to cut costs and eliminate waste where it exists.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

This Parliament also faces unfinished business in the context of our efforts to build a more tolerant, united, and just nation. When I last came before this assembly in August, I reported to the then outgoing parliamentarians that my government intended to submit a revised draft of the Constitution Amendment Bill with the purpose of ensuring that the primary text of our government is rendered fully neutral in terms of both gender and tribal affiliation or ethnicity.

It will, moreover, be the critical task of this Parliament to complete the process of eliminating all other laws [that] may discriminate on the basis of gender and/or tribe.

Let me here once again express my personal dismay about those, be they from either within or outside our country, who through their actions undermine the unifying, nonracial ideals that have long contributed to our peace and prosperity. In promoting tolerance, we cannot tolerate racism. Neither can we make collective progress if we allow ourselves to be divided by tribalism or xenophobia. The relative harmony of our nation is too precious for complacency in this respect.

Under our Constitution, every person is entitled to fundamental rights, including individual dignity, whatever their (I here quote) "race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed, or sex [i.e., gender], but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others."

In this context, our laws render discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, and/or religion illegal. Alleged incidents of discrimination in any sector, public or private, must thus remain a cause for proactive public concern.

LEGAL REFORM

The new Constitution Amendment Bill will, moreover, also incorporate major restructuring reforms of the attorney general's chambers,

which require further constitutional amendment. Among other things, it is proposed that this assembly will be served on a full-time basis by a dedicated senior parliamentary counsel, who will sit as an official with the clerk and will be available to advise the Speaker and the House, both when Parliament is sitting and when it is not. This will release the attorney general from parliamentary duties to concentrate on better service delivery in the justice system.

We also propose to install a constitutionally protected director of public prosecutions, who will spearhead the phased recovery from the Botswana Police of prosecutorial functions. This in turn should release those police officers presently involved in prosecutions to engage in their core function of eliminating the growing challenge of crime, especially crimes of violence, from our communities.

In order to realise our common vision of a safe and secure nation, we must also continue to empower our police service through increased staffing, greater training, and better equipment.

SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Our Vision 2016 also calls for us to remain compassionate and caring, as well as just. To maintain these values we must continue to integrate into the mainstream of our society those sections of the population that are marginalised by circumstance, such as the destitute and disabled. But inasmuch as we seek to reduce dependency on the state, we shall nonetheless remain committed to the continued provision of social-safety-net programmes for those in need.

DEFEATING HIV/AIDS

As it continues its grim harvest of premature death, the HIV/AIDS pandemic remains the greatest single challenge we collectively face. As I have said many times before, unless we can find the will and capacity to overcome this enemy, our progress in all other areas will be compromised. Without victory over HIV/AIDS, we cannot hope to defeat poverty through productivity. While the absence of HIV in itself is not a guar-

antee of prosperity, we can be sure that if unchecked, the spread of HIV will condemn us to stagnation and decline.

In our struggle against the virus, it is still too early as yet to say if the corner has been turned. What should, however, be clear is that we are now acquiring the capacity, in terms of both knowledge and infrastructure, to achieve victory.

Last year at this time, I said that in this war against the virus we have too often been our own worst enemies. Now, twelve months later, we can at least be encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive response to our routine testing initiative, as well as the rollout of our antiretroviral (ARV) programme.

But it must be recognised that our relative success in promoting testing and ARV rollout has created new challenges in terms of delivery. At the moment, at least ten thousand individuals are waiting to be placed on ARV therapy. This is largely due to human-resource constraints in terms of provision of follow-up testing and counselling services, which the Ministry of Health and the National AIDS Coordinating Agency (NACA), along with other stakeholders, are working to address on an urgent basis.

On a more positive note, I am pleased to report that our extensive counselling efforts have already resulted in a greater collective competence [in] properly using the therapies. More generally, we now have every reason to believe that during the life of this Parliament, we will turn back the virus in order to have an AIDS-free generation. At the same time, more and more of our already infected citizens will be able to live positively for much longer periods.

In this life-and-death struggle we hope that we shall continue to receive the generous support of our many international friends, to whom we already owe our unswerving gratitude. But the real onus will always be on us as individuals to know our status and act accordingly. In this respect, it is also encouraging to note that over the past year there has been a greater effort on the part of some churches and others to communicate the need for greater abstinence, especially among our early-teen population.

PUBLIC-SERVICE DELIVERY

The last twelve months have been marked by genuine progress in the implementation of [the] performance management system (PMS) in the public service. Ministries and departments have now put into place delivery strategies [for] what they themselves have identified as the most critical areas of performance management so as to enhance customer focus and efficiency. With this year's signing of performance agreements by permanent secretaries, their deputies, and heads of departments, we have been able to undertake performance reviews that track actual achievement with reference to performance plans. This process is meant to ensure that we, at all times, are able to make the most efficient use of the limited resources available. This in turn ensures that there is accountability and delivery in leadership.

These measures are already helping the public sector to evolve better service delivery in the context of its customers' and the public's expectations. This commitment is further reflected in our ongoing efforts to find creative ways to promote greater customer interaction and feedback through such initiatives as the *Talking Heads* radio programme, which has already proved to be a great success.

I am also pleased to be able to report that the implementation of PMS is now being rolled out at the local-authority level. We recognise that this is the area where these reforms should have the greatest impact. Here, too, we shall be closely monitoring and periodically reporting to this House on our progress. It has often been asserted that the "perfect bureaucrat" is someone who manages to escape all responsibility. With PMS now coming into force, such sentiment should not be applicable to our own public service.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

As a small, landlocked, and peace-loving country, [Botswana] has always had [an] interest [in] working for enhanced regional cooperation as part of our greater goal of achieving unity throughout Africa. In this context, cooperation with our

neighbours, through such multilateral institutions as the African Union, SADC, SACU, and NEPAD [New Partnership for Africa's Development], can no longer simply be seen as a foreign affair. We must rather appreciate the fact that in today's world, regional integration is emerging as a vital prerequisite for national development. One of the highlights of the coming year will therefore be our hosting of the SADC Summit.

As in the past, during the life of this Parliament, it will further remain the policy of this nation to be favourably disposed to[wards] all states that are favourably disposed towards us. In this respect, our minimal expectation shall be that, in accordance with the founding principle of the United Nations, other states will continue to respect the sovereign integrity of our nation, as we shall theirs.

ARTISTIC AND SPORTING ACHIEVEMENTS

I would be remiss if I did not at least acknowledge in passing that our country's favourable international profile is not simply a matter of positive diplomacy and the independent accolades of external organisations and think tanks. We live in a global village where our performance is watched by others in an increasing range of endeavours. In this respect, I am sure this House will agree with me that we can all take collective satisfaction in the increasing respect accorded to our athletes. Our Zebras have done us all proud. So have our Olympians and Paralympians (such as our own gold medallist Tshotlego Morama) through their improved performances. In such nontraditional areas as karate, chess, and motor sports, Botswana are also showing that they can compete with the best of the best.

In addition to various fields of sports, a growing number of our young men and women are also distinguishing themselves in music, the arts, architecture, and various forms of creative media. This challenges all of us, in both the public and private sector, to give our talented youth the support they both require and deserve.

CONCLUSION

During the life of this Parliament, our country will celebrate its fortieth anniversary of independence and thus enter its fifth decade as a sovereign republic. We shall thus also be but a decade short of 2016, the touchstone year of our long-term Vision. In human terms, forty years is often a time for recommitment. This is a quality that will clearly be required over the next five years if we are to realise the ambitious medium-term goals of our NDP 9, as well as our long-term Vision 2016.

The theme of recommitment is, of course, also especially appropriate on this day, when the political leaders here represented have personally taken individual oaths of service to the nation. Let us all therefore leave this hall today knowing that we are at the beginning of a difficult task to turn the great challenges [that] face us into greater opportunities for our children. This will require renewed partnership among all Batswana, but most especially on the part of the political leadership here assembled.

In accordance with our Constitution, it shall be my own task as president to continue to exercise executive authority over the next three and a half years. By the end of March 2008, I shall have to hand over the baton to another in whom I have the utmost confidence, having completed my own constitutionally stipulated maximum term of ten years in office. This is a good provision, which should not be altered. The smooth transfer of executive authority from one president to the next is now entrenched as a hallmark of our democratic stability.

As I noted earlier this year at the SADC meeting in Mauritius, I am now a mature man in a hurry! But I am also equally confident about this government's continuing capacity to bring about change for the better while preserving that which is best.

It has been said that different people react differently to the prospect of change. To the naturally fearful, it can seem threatening, opening up the prospect that things may get worse. To the hopeful, it is equally encouraging because things

may improve. But to the truly confident, change is a challenge to make things better. Let us here gathered therefore reciprocate the confidence that our electorate has so recently expressed in us by not shirking our responsibility to build a better Botswana.

Finally, as we face the challenges ahead, let us—whatever the nature of our personal faith in a higher authority—also seek the blessings and guidance of the Lord in all of our endeavours. With these words, let me conclude by requesting all those listening to me to also read the speech I made on the eve of election day.

Thank you, and God bless!