

Welcoming remarks by the Honorable Minister of Public Works and Transport, Mr. Popane Lebesa

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First and foremost let me pay my respects to His Majesty, King Letsie III,

The Right Honorable Prime Minister,
Chairman of SSATP Board
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is gratifying indeed to see SSATP delegates congregated at this, our Manthabiseng National Convention Centre this morning, with the sole purpose of discussing within the various thematic groups, issues that are close to our hearts in the transport sector. I believe you are well rested, and have started to enjoy the warm Basotho hospitality, the hallmark of our nation.

Today is not a day for speeches, as that time has been set aside for the official opening ceremony on Thursday 2nd November. Mine is to welcome you all to our beloved Mountain Kingdom and to express my gratitude and sincere thanks to you all for making time to come to Lesotho despite your busy schedules back home. It however behooves me ladies and gentlemen, to observe that this is indeed a historic moment, as it is a period when the SSATP is making its mid-term review of its activities, including the long-term development plan. The Conference activities have already started with the customary vigor and determination, as I am privy to the fact that the women's group wasted no time and started with their consultations and discussions from Friday last week. It is my belief that they had good discussions that will contribute positively to the debate on gender issues.

Lesotho like other developing countries places high priority on the development of the transport sector. Without adequate access and affordable mobility, Africa's poor will be unable to take full advantage of any improvement in education, health or other services. Lesotho has therefore, made great strides in the development of transport infrastructure, particularly roads, despite its meager resources. This, of course, has been achieved with assistance of her traditional cooperating partners, especially the European Commission, ADB and the World Bank.

For your information, at the time of Independence (i.e. in 1966) Lesotho had only 3 km stretch of paved road. But by the year 2005, Lesotho boasted more than 1300 km of paved roads. It is to be noted that the upgrading of more than 100 Km of roads to bitumen standard has recently commenced.

Master of Ceremonies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The work of the thematic groups within the SSATP structure is of vital importance, because this is where our transport specialists and professionals meet to contextualize issues within the prevailing socio-economic challenges of our respective countries. The work of these groups will become a success if we are well coordinated in our respective member countries. I therefore urge SSATP members to give full support to the coordinating offices and National Coordinators to perform better than is currently the case.

African Ministers committed themselves to the implementation of LTDP through the Bamako Declaration. Therefore there is a need to review our progress and consider the findings of the Output to Purpose Review (OPR) which I hope will strengthen the achievement of LTDP results in 2007 and the SSATP vision.

I am aware that the schedule of the day is very tight indeed and therefore does not allow the luxury of long winded remarks, I will therefore conclude by saying let us make our African continent a better place to live in, where poverty will be a thing of the past. Let us find solutions to our transport problems and let us refine those policies that have so far worked for us. Let us make Africa proud. I believe that you will have time for good discussions and will at the end, provide a feedback for the honorable ministers' meeting on Thursday and Friday.

I thank you for your attention.