

Opening speech by the Honorable Minister of Public Works and Transport Mr. Popane Lebesa MP

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His Majesty King Letsie III, Head of State

The Right Honorable Prime Minister, Head of the Government of Lesotho

The Honorable Deputy Prime Minister here present with us

Honorable Ministers

Chairman of the SSATP Board

Representatives of SSATP Cooperating Partners

Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It shall be recalled that during the 2005 SSATP Annual Meeting in Bamako, Mali, I expressed the desire of my country to host the 2006 SSATP Annual Meeting. Subsequently, the SSATP Board accepted our offer to host this important conference. I am therefore very pleased to welcome you all to Lesotho. No effort will be spared to make your stay in Lesotho a fruitful, pleasant and memorable one.

Master of ceremonies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It would have been our wish to host the full complement of Ministers from SSATP member countries here today. However, I am equally happy to welcome all the Ministers here present. In terms of the format for the Maseru Meeting, the SSATP Board saw the need to confine our engagement to the strategic review of our mandate, more especially the Bamako Declaration and the Long Term Development Plan (LTDP), with this select group of Ministers. I do hope, SSATP Board Chairperson, that other members will embrace with open minds the outcome of our deliberations.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

For our information, at the time of Lesotho's Independence (in 1966), Lesotho had only 3 Km stretch of paved road covering the distance from the border with South Africa to the then town or village center of Maseru. But by the year 2005, we had built more than 1,300 Km of paved roads. It is to be noted that the upgrading of more than 100 Km of roads to bitumen standard is currently in progress. Lesotho has therefore, made great strides in the development of transport infrastructure, particularly roads, despite its meager resources. We have a total road network of gravel and pave totaling more than 7,000 Km. At independence in 1966, the network covered less than 5% of what

we have now. This, of course, has been achieved with assistance from our traditional cooperating partners, especially the European Commission, the African Development Bank and the World Bank.

Master of Ceremonies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

African Ministers committed themselves to the implementation of the 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 our efforts towards the achievements of our LTDP objectives by 2007 and the SSATP vision itself. At this juncture, I would like to take the opportunity to give an account of how far Lesotho has gone in the implementation of the Bamako Declaration.

- a) The Poverty Reduction and Transport Strategy Review (PRTSR) which is carried out with the purpose of anchoring transport strategies in the poverty reduction strategy has been completed. The results for Lesotho has been incorporated in our Transport Sector Policy while recommendations on Poverty Reduction Strategy will be considered during the latter's review. The Ministry of Public Works and Transport will continue to play an important role in the poverty Reduction Strategies of the Government of Lesotho.
- b) Lesotho and the Republic of South Africa have signed a Declaration of Intent that provides for a joint effort to exploit ways and means of developing road infrastructure on corridors leading to borders between the two countries. Under the joint Bilateral Cooperation Commission, the two countries have established Economic Clusters that look into the operation of the Declaration of Intent. Furthermore, the two countries have an Inter-Country Committee of rail infrastructure including the building of a dry port at our Maseru rail terminal. At least two projects are underway under the guidance of the Declaration.
- c) The Lesotho Road Fund was established in 1997 and a second generation Road Fund has also been established. The road user charges have been reviewed and proposed increases will raise road user charges from about 30% to 60% of road maintenance needs. We continue to source sustainable funding through our Road Fund for the maintenance of our road network. Cooperating partners like the World Bank, the European Commission, Kuwait Fund, BADEA, Irish Aid and other bilateral cooperating partners continue to assist us with financial resources for the development of our network. However, even with increased road development financing, appropriate maintenance of the road condition will be impaired in the absence of proper and adequate road management. The Government of Lesotho has therefore, approved institutional reform within the road sub-sector in the form of establishment of a Roads Directorate for management of the road sub-sector. We have also established a statistical division within our Planning Unit of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, with the aim of developing a database to enable us to monitor and evaluate the transport sector, in order to ensure its efficiency and sustainability.
- d) We have established a Department of Road Safety and its activities such as vehicle inspection and testing, drivers training, reduction of black spots and establishment of a Road

Safety Council will be given their deserved prominence under the proposed World Bank and EC funded Integrated Transport Project. Road safety curricula have also been developed so that road safety can be taught at school level. The Ministry is gender sensitive in its approach as it has a number of female engineers and contractors, in a field that has traditionally been male dominated. We continue to encourage our female employees to improve their skills through training opportunities.

And

- e) The Ministry has developed procedures for ensuring that other transport cross-cutting issues like environmental, social and HIV/AIDS issues are incorporated when implementing transport sector programs and projects.

In a nutshell, Lesotho is on course in the implementation of the Bamako Declaration. What may be needed is to develop an action plan with measurable indicators to monitor our progress more accurately.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Though we have done well in highlighting the importance of a transport policy that is anchored in poverty reduction, we should not lose sight of the fact that economic growth, especially tourism and trade development, will thrive better in a developed and well integrated transport system.

Being a landlocked country, Lesotho desperately needs aviation and rail services that could accelerate delivery of exports to their overseas and seaport destinations timely. Lesotho therefore places high priority on the full implementation of the Almaty Declaration and Program of Action, the SADC Protocol on Transport, Communications and Meteorology that highlight the right to landlocked countries to unfettered access to the sea through transit corridors. Lesotho also attaches importance to the Declaration by African Ministers responsible for Transport, of April 2005, as well as the Brazzaville Declaration of African Ministers Responsible for Rail Transport. These instruments aim to assist in the facilitation of trade, access to markets and in the integration of the African continent that will result in creation of employment, skills mobility and poverty reduction.

Master of Ceremonies, I do not wish to make any further remarks as we are now all looking forward to hearing the official speech of the Honorable Acting Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Lesao Lehohla.

I thank you for your attention.