

## **Keynote address by the Honorable Acting Prime Minister, Mr. Lesao Lehohla**

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His Majesty, King Letsie III,

The Right Honorable Prime Minister,  
Honorable President of the Senate,  
Honorable Speaker of the National Assembly,  
Your Lordship the Chief Justice,  
Honorable Ministers,  
Representative of the African Union,  
Excellencies Heads of Diplomatic Mission and of International,  
Organizations and Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities,  
Chairperson of the SSATP Board Cooperating Partners of the SSATP,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish, on behalf of the Basotho nation and indeed on my own behalf, to warmly welcome you all guests to Lesotho, the Kingdom in the sky. I am reliably informed that the meeting of officials started on- 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2006 and therefore, by now those of you who have been here since then would have a lot to say about the legendary Basotho hospitality.

As a country, we are gratified and greatly honored to serve as host for the 2006 Annual General Meeting of the Sub-Saharan African Transport Policy Program (SSATP). This august meeting has assembled together a select group of Sub-Saharan African Ministers of Transport and of Finance, experts from the World Bank and the Program's cooperating partners, African Transport practitioners, Africa's Regional Economic Commissions and other high level participants with the interest in the Program's objectives.

It can naturally be expected, therefore, that building on the success of previous SSATP Annual General Meetings, the outcomes of the Maseru meeting will stand out as an evaluating, consolidating and strategizing one for the way forward, and therefore, one of a special kind.

Master of Ceremonies, Distinguished Guests,

The pivotal contribution of Transport Infrastructure to economic growth and poverty reduction is universally acknowledged. Admittedly, post colonial Africa has experienced rapid development of transport infrastructure. However, the outreach, quality, and efficiency of existing infrastructure are far from adequate. Increasingly, African Governments are facing serious resource constraints in financing new infrastructure and maintaining the old. This is happening at a time of rising expectations and demand for expansion of transport infrastructure. This scenario is further compounded by the ever rising demands on national budgets to meet other equally important challenges such as provision of basic education, primary health, food security, job creation and addressing the scourge of HIV and AIDS.

The financing of transport infrastructure poses far reaching implications for sustainable growth of African economies. It is one of the main drivers of external borrowing and hence of the resultant indebtedness. The heavy burden of debt servicing greatly diminishes the potential for African economies to successfully attain the Millennium Development Goals. Thus, it is most appropriate and timely for Africa's development partners to view the debt problem in Africa not only in terms of the highly indebted poor countries initiative (HIPO) but also in the context of debt relief for least developed countries such as Lesotho.

Master of Ceremonies, Distinguished Guests,

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) lays out Africa's vision on infrastructure development as one where the continent's infrastructure gap is completely bridged. This vision is based on the premise that "if Africa had the same basic infrastructure as developed countries, it would be in a more favorable position to focus on production and improving productivity for international competition". Clearly the world is presently opening up global competition in trade with a clear knowledge that Africa will not compete effectively in such a playing field.

Notwithstanding the significant gains made in transport infrastructure over the past forty years, major gaps still exist. African Governments are still yet to secure funding for construction of road and rail networks. These links are essential for domestic, social, political and economic integration, cross border and transit transport facilitation. Some notable successes have been achieved in the field of rural access. However, the resources at the disposal of African Governments have fallen far short of the needs of their communities. In the case of Lesotho, rural access is being promoted through labor-based road construction in which men and women participate on equal footing as laborers. Under this program, a core of male and female small contractors has been developed and local communities benefit in terms of short term employment. Many African Road Administrations have visited Lesotho to learn from our success story. Enhanced donor support to this particular program would greatly assist African Governments in their quest for reduction of rural poverty.

The construction of Intermediate Means of Transport Infrastructure like foot bridges across rivers results in a dramatic improvement in the lives of rural communities. Foot bridges facilitate access to public services, markets and schools for children. However, due to limited resources, it is difficult to adequately meet even such basic yet relatively cheap infrastructure due to the widespread nature of this need.

Special mention must be made to the unique problems of the fifteen landlocked countries of Africa. Their lack of access to the sea, remoteness from major international markets, inadequate transport infrastructure, excessive transport costs, and inefficient transport and customs procedures largely contribute to their marginalization and inability to integrate with the globalize economy. This problem is further exacerbated by the less than adequate facilitation and extremely expensive charges imposed by non-landlocked sea accessed sister African countries.

The Almaty Declaration and Program of Action as well as the African Action Plan of the Economic Commission for Africa recognize the urgent need for granting preferential treatment to these landlocked countries so as to enable them to overcome their daunting challenges. In this context, it is important to emphasize the need for international donor support to assist these countries to develop their road and rail corridors. Due recognition should also be given to the African transit countries which are similarly faced with the problems of poor infrastructure and limited financial

resources.

It has to be acknowledged that our co-operating partners have played a major role in successes scored so far in transport infrastructure development in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of Lesotho, there was virtually no transport infrastructure to talk of at independence and it is with the assistance of our co-operating partners including the lending institutions that Lesotho has achieved a fair measure of transport infrastructure. For this, we are indeed, most grateful. However, it has to emphasized that the basic transport infrastructure requirements of our respective countries is far from adequate in spite of the rapidly shortening cue of cooperating partners in this sector.

Since its birth, the SSATP has consistently served as an embodiment and beacon of best practice in the Sub-Saharan transport sector. The anchoring of pro-poor approaches in its vision is most appropriate. In this connection, it is pertinent to recall the role the historic intervention of African Transport Ministers and SSATP in restating the centrality of infrastructure development in achieving Millennium Development Goals ahead or special meeting of the United Nations two years ago where the international community met to review and recommit to the imperative of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Thus, it gives without saying that if we consciously and strategically increase our transport infrastructure and services budget, provide access roads to our communities, provide efficient transport services to urban dwellers and promote road safety, our export trade will thrive, employment will be created and access to social and economic services will be greatly improved.

Because of cross-cutting nature of the transport sector, it important to engage in cross-sector dialogue between the Ministers of Transport and Ministers responsible for the social and economic sectors, civil society, private sector, and priority population groups as they benefit directly, from transport infrastructure and services. In this Consultative process, the Ministers of Finance should play a key role. This will provide a unique opportunity for frank discussion to explore the potential for increased allocation of resources to infrastructure needs. In most of our countries budgetary allocations to transport infrastructure are in the top priority category yet, because of the sheer magnitude of the sector, maintenance budgets have not kept pace with development budgets thus exacerbating the already perilous state of our road network. The extent to which our own people can pay for the usage of transport services on the basis of user pays principle needs to be carefully balanced with the issue of affordability.

It is my sincere hope that the SSATP will also devote its attention to the role the transport sector can play in combating the spread of HIV & AIDS pandemic. In - Lesotho, contract documents have been modified to incorporate social, HIV and AIDS clauses. As a result, it is now mandatory for road construction contractors to have a clinic at project site to raise workers and community awareness about HIV and AIDS as well as to provide mitigation measures.

Program Manager, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The great majority of our countries have embraced the reforms in the transport sector recommended by the FSATP and our cooperating partners. A number of countries including Lesotho have respectively developed their transport policy documents anchored on their respective poverty reduction strategies. Others are in the process of developing such policy documents. Amongst the reforms undertaken, suffice it to mention, the establishment of Road Funds and Road Agencies or Road Directorate in the case of Lesotho. It is our sincere hope that with these reforms, our countries

have created an enabling environment not only for the success of their infrastructure programs but also for increased donor participation in our infrastructure development endeavors.

I am reliably informed that the format of the Maseru meeting has been altered from the original intention of bringing together all the stakeholder Sub-Saharan African Ministers of Transport and Finance to that of a select core group of Ministers; basically taking the format of a strategizing meeting particularly for concretizing a practical way forward for implementing the goals and aspirations of the 2005 Bamako declaration and the long development plan of the SSATP Program. Even though we would have wished to host as many ministers as possible, I see a lot of merit in having formatted the Maseru meeting in this manner.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the SSATP as well as the member countries for deciding to hold this Annual General Meeting in our Mountain Kingdom. The organizers of this grand occasion including the World Bank, the Service Provider, the SSATP Regional Coordinators and program management, staff of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport and other Government officials, all deserve to be congratulated for work well done.

I wish you every success, happy and fruitful deliberations. It is now my singular honor to declare this Ministerial Forum meeting officially opened.

KHOTSO, PULA, NALA.