



*PERMANENT MISSION OF THE KINGDOM
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STATEMENT

BY

**THE HONOURABLE MR. APESI RATS'ELE
DEPUTY MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF THE
KINGDOM OF LESOTHO**

AT THE

**FIRST SESSION OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE
FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND
SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HABITAT III)**

**17 SEPTEMBER 2014
NEW YORK**

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Chairperson,

It is an honour for me to address the First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). At the outset allow me to congratulate you and the other Members of the Bureau on your well-deserved election. I assure you of my delegation's full support.

We welcome the Report of the Secretary General of the Conference (A/CONF.226/PC.1/5) which clearly summarizes key developments since Habitat II, major existing and emerging urban challenges, while focusing on the major role that urbanization can play in their alleviation or resolution. Habitat III will be an ideal occasion for the international community to confront these challenges.

Chairperson,

In recent years the United Nations has worked tirelessly to strengthen the global commitment to sustainable urbanization with a special focus on the implementation of a "New Urban Agenda" that will build on the already existing Habitat Agenda. While significant progress has been made in this regard, Governments still face urban challenges greater than ever before. Amongst others, these challenges are due to failure to implement previous policies, shortcomings in existing policies and the growth of rapid urbanization.

Chairperson,

Lesotho believes that the future is urban. Cities and human settlements serve as engines of economic development and are central to the process of production and consumption. While there is a strong positive connection between economic growth and urbanization, this potential relationship is in itself not spontaneous or self – generating. There is a need to focus on policies and strategies that foster sustainable and equitable use of urban spaces.

Chairperson,

Allow me to share with you certain strides that my country has made towards implementation of the Habitat Agenda and other relevant internationally agreed goals and targets. In partnership with Development Partners, the Government of Lesotho has introduced land reforms that facilitate security of

tenure and improve investments in land. Moreover, a series of prepared spatial plans are being implemented, ranging from the National Settlement Policy, District Physical plans, Town Structure plans and various local and subject area plans. The aim of these plans is to guide physical development and investment across the national space.

Furthermore, we are currently completing a housing profile study as a first step towards compiling a National Housing Policy. The Policy will guide the implementation of housing, not only as social and economic good, but as a way of creating employment for the youth. Both the profile study and the Policy are being compiled with assistance from UN-Habitat and UNDP. We believe that the Policy will establish a connection between the dynamics of urbanization and the overall process of national development.

Chairperson,

Despite our efforts, a number of challenges still beset us as we engage in exploring ways on how urbanization can be an effective tool for the integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Lesotho has a rugged terrain that covers 90% of the land area. This poses a challenge to our developmental efforts as providing services to the remote areas requires huge capital outlay.

The main driver of urbanization in Lesotho is rural-urban migration caused by rural poverty and a decline in agricultural production. The effects of climate change have also negatively affected agricultural production. Because of the increasing precariousness of agriculture and weakened mechanisms for land management, there is unprecedented pressure for conversion of agricultural land to other uses, mainly residential uses.

Chairperson,

Only a UN conference has the convening power to bring together all actors needed to achieve solutions for the complex challenge of urbanization. The preparatory process for Habitat III should allow and ensure that the 2016 Conference will result in an innovative, forward-looking and action-oriented outcome document.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm my Country's commitment to the Habitat Agenda and the goals and objectives of Habitat III which seeks to define new global urban priorities for the coming twenty years.

I thank you.