

**SPEECH**

**by**

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**BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY (BDP)**

**NATIONAL COUNCIL**

**GABORONE REGION**

**VENUE: MAHARAJA CONFERENCE CENTRE**

**DATE: SATURDAY 31 MARCH 2007 – SUNDAY 1 APRIL 2007**

**Modula-Setilo wa Phathi, Rre Lt. Gen. S K I  
Khama**

**Modula-Setilo wa Komite-kgolo ya Bomme, Mme  
Botlogile Tshireletso**

**Modula-Setilo wa Komite-kgolo ya Banana, Rre  
Kefentse Mzwinila**

**Maloko a Komite-kgolo ya Phathi ya Domkraga**

**Badula-Setilo le Bakwaledi ba Dikgaolo-kgolo**

**Badula-Setilo le Bakwaledi ba Dikgaolo**

**Batlotlegi Mapalamente a Domkraga**

**Batlotlegi Makhanselara**

**Madomi a a rategang**

It is once again my singular honour to speak to you on the occasion of this 42<sup>nd</sup> National Council. I trust that you have all travelled safely to Gaborone and will spend the next two days deliberating on important policy matters as well as assessing programs and projects, the impact they are having on our peoples' lives and determining, where necessary, what changes we ought to make.

2. I trust that as we are half way through our term of five years we can do real introspection not only of these

programs but also of our own performance as a Party and government. Are our structures in place? And is the government machinery effective in delivering projects and services to our people. These questions are especially important as we have just passed the largest ever budget which should have a very positive impact on the lives of Batswana.

### **BIG PROJECTS - LETSEMA LE LETSWELETSE**

3. I am excited by the fact that we are on the verge of undertaking major projects and that over the past 40 years there is not a single aspect of the life of a Motswana that has not been positively affected by the policies and performance of the Botswana Democratic Party. There has been massive development of physical infrastructure throughout our country. Schools, Hospitals, Health Posts, Water reticulations, Kgotla buildings and telecommunications networks adorn every locality. Even as I speak to you today, development activity is being undertaken by your government virtually in every village in the Republic. As a party we should be proud of all these monuments to our national principle of Development.
  
4. Our detractors continue to blind-fold themselves both mentally and metaphorically by claiming that the Botswana Democratic Party has failed to develop this country. They forget though, that Batswana are not

themselves blindfolded, they are able to see what is happening around them. I would like to assure all Batswana that as we begin the 42<sup>nd</sup> year of Democratic Party rule and stewardship of the affairs of this country we will increase the tempo and magnitude of development activity to a level where even the blindfolded will be so tantalized that they will forcibly open their eyes.

5. Batswana will soon see massive dams at the confluence of the Shashe and Tati, as well as on the Thune, Lotsane and Mosetse Rivers. These projects will cost 2 billion pula (P2 billion). At the same time your government will commence the construction of three major educational institutions, namely a Medical School, a Teaching Hospital and the Botswana International University of Science and Technology. These will cost 6.37 billion pula (P6.37 billion).
6. Thus when we say Letsema le Tsweletse we are not parroting an empty slogan or simply engaging in political rhetoric. No, we mean business. It is because of this commitment that Botswana has been found to have the most welcoming investment climate in Africa. As we continue to improve the investment climate, we are grateful that there is an appreciable response from the private sector.

7. Some of you will have seen the changing skyline along the road to the Sir Seretse Khama International Airport with the emergence of the Diamond Trading Company (Botswana) facility. This is the building where it is planned that all the diamonds produced by Debswana and DeBeers will be sorted, valued and aggregated for distribution to diamond polishers and manufacturers in Botswana and throughout the world. It will cost ½ billion pula and operations are scheduled to come on stream in 2008. This will be the first time that such a massive aggregation of diamonds will be taking place on the African soil. Indeed we hope to be the pride of Africa in diamond trading and in time we should become a true centre of excellence in diamond processing.
  
8. Other private sector projects that will be highly visible for all to see are new metals refinery at the Tati Nickel Mine near Francistown at the cost of 4 billion pula. The expanded Morupule Power station at 7 billion pula and of course the Mmamabula complex of projects at 42 billion pula.

All these projects and the 6 billion pula expansion of Debswana mines mean that the private sector will commit almost P60 billion in big projects in our economy between now and 2009. This is unprecedented in the history of Botswana. I am sure

all objective minded Batswana will acknowledge that this is testimony to the effectiveness of the policies of the Botswana Democratic Party.

### **PARTY UNITY**

9. It is common knowledge that the BDP has been bedeviled by factionalism and infighting over many years. I am happy to note that this is no longer the case. Our efforts to bring all of us together and to foster unity in our party are now paying dividends.

When we convened the meetings at the Oasis Motel in November/December 2005, our detractors and those among us who had seen the factions entrench themselves were sceptical.

10. It is very gratifying to note that last year we spent time and resources talking peace and unity in our party. The seminars that were held around the country received overwhelming support from our membership. Now we should work on consolidating these gains. We all know that a united BDP cannot be defeated by the opposition.
11. Mr Chairman, I am happy that at these seminars our resource people spoke about Bulela-Ditswe. In particular, our members seem now to accept the results of the primary elections. Our performance in

the various bye-elections is clear evidence of an emerging positive trend where candidates support the victors and the party after Bulela-Ditswe. A political party cannot win elections when its cadres and its leadership are pre-occupied with fighting for positions and pulling each other down. As we prepare for our primary elections a year from now, and ultimately the General Elections, it is important that we focus on the bigger picture.

### **COMPLACENCY**

12. Fellow Democrats, we won the last elections comfortably in terms of parliamentary and council seats. Our victory does not look so comfortable when one looks at the popular vote. We won around 52% of the popular vote thus leaving the opposition with 46%. This is a worrying picture. It means we are looking at a scenario where it is possible that we win the election in 2009 but actually lose the popular vote. While there is no constitutional prohibition for this, we must accept it would be undesirable. Of course a lot of our votes went to the opposition because of our own disgruntlement with the results of Bulela-Ditswe.
  
13. The opposition are themselves fragmented and in disarray, but this must not be cause for complacency. Our membership must be well informed on the major issues so as to be resilient in the defence of our party,

government and policies. Our structures must be revitalized and lively at all times. This means the Central Committee must continue to hold the Regions to account so that they in turn can supervise the lower structures all the way down to the cell.

### **YOUTH ISSUES**

14. A fundamental strength of BDP policy over the years has been the drive to assist our youth in self-actualisation as stated in both our constitution and manifestos over the years. Our Youth remain one of our greatest resources and assets as a nation, and we have high hopes and expectations for their success. For some time the government has had a number of initiatives aimed at empowering and assisting our Youth. Such interventions included our education, health, and social welfare system which were designed to create an enabling environment for all our citizens. However, there is only so much the BDP government can do, our Youth need to be assertive and aggressive in terms of their economic empowerment, and in assisting the BDP in obtaining its objectives of creating sustainable employment opportunities.
  
15. The BDP government created the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA) to assist

all Batswana with access to finance for business pursuits. Recently we have instituted a preferential treatment policy at CEDA in the form of the Young Farmers scheme, which provides preferential treatment for Youth venturing into the agricultural sector. Creating a preferential treatment scheme for Youth at CEDA underscores the BDP government's commitment of Youth empowerment. It is also noteworthy to mention that Youth are the only segment of society that has been granted preferential treatment so far, and this is further attestation of our resolve.

16. The BDP government is in the process of considering preferential tax treatment for companies that either employ or have invested significantly in Youth. Recently the tax provisions created a preferential tax system for companies that invest in their staff through training, and in most instances those that are being heavily trained are Youth.
17. As a government we have seen the need to assist out-of-school Youth with grants to assist them in becoming economically active. Initially the capital outlay was P3 million. We have recently increased our commitment to the programme ten-fold to P30 million.

18. I called on the private sector as our partners in national development to assist and augment government efforts at Youth empowerment, and there are a few organisations that have heeded my call. Kgalagadi Breweries Ltd. has for the past couple of years been running the “Kickstart” programme which has aimed at increasing the business skills of Youth through training and financial assistance. In addition, government has been in the process of reviewing the experience requirements for entry level positions into the civil service with a view to reducing high experience requirements for entry level positions.
  
19. Different sections of civil and political society have been advocating for the creation of a Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture and among these advocates were our Youth Wing. At the National Youth Congress which was held in Bobonong in July 2006 the Youth Wing resolved to send their leadership to lobby the BDP leadership on this. Recently I took the decision to create a Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture which should improve the co-ordination of Youth affairs, prioritise Youth issues and provide a platform for harnessing and developing our greatest national resources.

I have been reliably informed that most Youth throughout the country have welcomed the new

Ministry and are eager to see it carrying out its mandate.

20. As the BDP government we have attempted to create an enabling environment for our Youth, but there is still much that needs to be done. Youth unemployment rates remains high, as are the Youth voter apathy statistics. We need to create employment opportunities for our Youth, as well as increasing their involvement in the political process. A lot of the responsibility for creating enabling environments for economic empowerment and political participation will lay with the BDP government, but a great measure of the responsibility will also rest with the Youth themselves and other stakeholders. I call upon the Youth to actively participate in the various government initiatives, and to also take the leadership role in finding solutions of Youth unemployment and political participation.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN**

21. March is the month when the International Community celebrates the achievements of women in society. Botswana may not be aware that a recent study by the firm of accountants Grant Thornton states that Botswana women are breaking the glass ceiling in the boardroom faster than their counterparts in the developing world. This study which was

released this month ranks Botswana sixth among developing countries when it comes to the percentage of women in senior management of business. Botswana is at thirty-one percent (31%) ahead of South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

22. While there is a lot to celebrate, a lot more still needs to be done to ensure that Botswana women are not discriminated against. Following the 1998 Review of all Laws that affect the status of women in Botswana, we introduced a number of measures to eliminate gender inequality. These include the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 1995; the Deeds Registry Act 1996; and the abolition of the Marital Power Act to mention but a few. I would like to urge all concerned to ensure that all Laws which are intended to level the playing field as between men and women are implemented. For, failure to implement a law relegates us to a status which is as bad as when such a law did not exist.
  
23. Fellow Democrats, as a party and as a Government, we have done everything possible to remove inequality, but there are certain beliefs and cultural impediments emanating from the patriarchal nature of our society which still put Botswana women at a disadvantage when they have to compete for political office. I would like to see our party taking the lead in neutralizing

these impediments. There is not glass ceiling in the Botswana Democratic Party.

24. Another serious issue which distresses me intensely is the violence which is perpetrated against women and girls in the home and in society at large. Although sentences for this crime have been made stiffer, the incident of violence against women is on the increase. Our party will collaborate with experts and others in civil society to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to fight this cancerous development in our society.

#### **LABOUR RELATIONS WITHIN THE BOTSWANA ECONOMY**

25. Over the years, one of the key economic management strategies of the Botswana Democratic Party was to ensure that workers were not exploited. In pursuit of this strategy we initiated a comprehensive review of our Trade Union and Industrial Relations Legislation. The objective was to create a climate in which unions had greater freedom of action and enhance their collective bargaining strength. These initiatives were largely welcomed by the workers as they resulted in a steady growth of the union movement in an atmosphere where government intervention in labour relations issues was minimal.

26. Indeed an elaborate system of consensus based dispute resolution is now in place and when it becomes necessary to have recourse to higher authority, a well resourced Industrial Court and panels of mediators and arbitrators are available to adjudicate. Although the system has worked reasonably well in terms of protecting workers rights and strengthening employee involvement in the governance of their work place, in some sectors, experience has not always been positive. Our mining sector has been experiencing unstable industrial relations and calls for government intervention are growing louder. Some analysts attribute this instability to manipulation by some opposition parties while others blame it on insensitive management.
27. Perhaps the time has now come for us, as a party, and a government to engage the labour movement and call for proposals on what further reforms should be introduced to restore normalcy in our industrial relations. Meanwhile I applaud the efforts of all those workers who have resisted the politicisation of trade union movements. There is a real danger that workers interests would be sacrificed if they were to be manipulated by political parties.

## **AGITATION FOR POLITICAL REFORM**

28. In the recent life of our country there has been growing agitation for political reforms. Proponents of reform come from a diverse background and include the opposition, civil society and members of our own party. Through various forums at their disposal they advance the view that the country must embrace some reforms in order to consolidate its democratic credentials. They also point out that we are lagging behind new democracies within the region which have adopted different ways of doing things. Such agitation must be viewed within the context of healthy political debate as must be the norm in a vibrant democracy such as ours.

29. We are a pioneer of multi party democracy and governance on the continent. Throughout our forty year existence we have remained true to the ideals and principles of democracy and political plurality. In this regard therefore we must acknowledge that in order for democracy to flourish it must be constantly interrogated and be the subject of review. Every system of governance, particularly one in which legitimacy is derived from the people, must validate itself through reform in response to prevailing conditions. As the BDP we have gone through instances of democratic validation before. Democrats will recall that in 1997 we enacted a reform package by reducing the vote age to eighteen, setting up the

Independent Electoral Commission and granting the external ballot, among others.

Much as the opposition were quick to claim credit for the reforms, it was not as if similar debates were not taking place within the organs of our party. The reforms were consequently a result of national discourse by citizens keen on improving their system of governance. If we, as the ruling party were not convinced about the efficacy of the introducing those reforms, then clearly they would not have seen the light of day.

31. As a result the current debate must be seen in the context of a country with a history of reform brought about by public debate. In my address to delegates during the 2006 national council I made reference to the issue of political reforms. At its conclusion the national council resolved that debate on the matter should continue. Central Committee was also mandated to set up a task team to examine prospective areas of political reform and report back to this session of the national council.

### **PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION**

32. Our view is that the current First Past the Post system has served the country well and continues to deliver stable governments. Experience has demonstrated

that some countries practicing variations of proportional representation are prone to instability because of the many trade offs that must be entered into to form government. It must be noted that proportional representation tends to be the favoured electoral system in post conflict societies because it acts as a tool for national reconciliation and inclusive governance. Such situation does not obtain in our case.

33. Another argument against PR is that it gives inordinate power to the party leadership in the sense that they determine the positioning of candidates on the party list with minimal recourse to the will of the majority as is the case under our *bulela ditswe*. In other words introducing PR would take away the power of rank and file democrats to determine their choice of candidate for national elections. They would not have the opportunity to determine the identity of the person who will end up representing them.
34. The other disadvantage of PR is that it undermines a fundamental aspect of our democratic culture in that it removes a representative from direct interaction with a constituency. Under a PR system legislators are not linked to an identifiable group of constituents. This situation impedes accessibility and democratic accountability. Certainly a case can be made for PR

with regard to inclusion of marginalized groups such as the disabled and women who tend to struggle in an open contest. But given their comparative strengths and weakness, our view is that the current FPTP system has stood the country in good stead and functions well.

### **DIRECT ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT**

35. An argument in favour of direct election is that the president must be accountable to the nation. The argument is fundamentally flawed in the sense that a president elected under our current system is also directly accountable to the nation. Through various institutions such as the Kgotla and Parliament, the president interacts directly with Batswana, and as a matter of fact engages with the citizenry at a much closer level than directly elected presidents. It is also inaccurate to suggest under our system voters go to the polls ignorant of who they will become the president. Before the nation goes to elections every party engages in an internal process to select its presidential candidate.
  
36. The person so styled formalizes their candidature at the High Court, through a nomination exercise by one thousand supporters. The understanding, which has never lent itself to any ambiguity or confusion, is that such an individual becomes president if the party they

represent gains the majority of seats in the legislature. We must also be mindful that a directly elected president will also be entitled to choose members of his government from outside parliament. Clearly that is a lot of power concentrated in the hands of one individual. Quite contrary to those who think the president is too powerful under our constitution, a directly elected president exercise much more power.

37. It has also been demonstrated that a presidential system lends itself to a scenario where the majority party may not necessarily be the same party to which the president belongs. This creates a gridlock in governance with the president in constant opposition to the legislature and vice versa. As a developing country, and without saying reform is not necessary, we must strive to put more emphasis on changes that will enhance service delivery to the people.

### **PARTY FUNDING**

38. At the 2004 Kasane national youth congress, delegates resolved to request government to consider state funding for political parties. The resolution was important in the sense that it indicated our youth were in touch with contemporary national issues. In the history of this country political parties have traditionally subsisted on the goodwill of their membership through donations and subscriptions.

The larger a party, the more enhanced its chances of generating more revenue. Advocates of state funding take the view that if parties are forced to rely on the benevolence of donors, then such donors may seek to influence public policy for benefit. A corollary to the reasoning is that special interest groups such as big business and trade unions can exert a hold on the policy process because the party relies on them for its funding.

39. Another, and more disturbing argument is that in a climate of unregulated private funding, parties may find themselves receiving ill gotten money, thereby finding themselves complicit in criminal activity. All these arguments are not without foundation. On the inverse side there are those who say state funding might promote the proliferation of more parties whose desire is to gain access to public funds. An additional view is that tax payers' funds must be committed to national development and not to the sustenance of political formations whose objectives tend to be sectarian.

We have kept an open mind on this issue so that democrats can further look into it in time for the 2009 general elections.

## **CULTURE OF DEBATE**

40. On the final note let me state that political reform must take cognizance of our own conditions as a country. Reform must never be for its own sake, or because it is the trend elsewhere. In the ultimate we must reform to add value to our democracy, and improve the lot of our people. Having said that, we must not shy away from engaging with these issues. Ours is a democratic organization and a culture of critical and constructive debate can only make the party and its government stronger. We will form consensus on some topical issues and disagree on others but that does not mean we must stop talking.