

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY MR. FESTUS G. MOGAE  
PRESIDENT OF THE  
BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

**TO THE**

**NATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE  
BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY  
WOMEN'S WING**

**17<sup>TH</sup> May 2007  
Tati Siding – Tati East Constituency**

Party Chairman and Vice President, Lt Gen. S. K. I Khama

The Chairperson of the BDP Women's Wing, Hon MP Botlogile  
Tshireletso  
and members of the your committee

The Chairperson of the National Youth Executive Committee, Mr Ofentse  
Mzwinila  
and members of the your committee

Members of the Central Committee

Chairperson SWAPO Women's League

Chairpersons and Secretaries of all Party Structures

Distinguished Guests

Dear Democrats

1. I am honoured once again to be given the opportunity to address the first reformed BDP Women's Wing. I am saying this because you recently, changed your rules and regulations to ensure that decisions in your congresses are taken by women only and not men. I am happy that we have come this far. Who said the BDP is not dynamic? We live with the times and I am happy to be part of the process. Tsholetsa! I urge you to encourage the Youth to also ensure that decisions at their congresses are taken by youth only and not the elders.

2. Madomi, The party looks to its organs especially the Women's Wing to maintain a state of alertness. This is because the majority of the membership of our party comprises women and they can be found in all the party structures that are so critical to our organizational efficiency. We are honoured to have women of such immense dedication in our Party and we trust that your numbers will continue to grow.

3. Given your numbers and organizational capabilities, we expect you to mobilize not only the female sector of the population but also your family members of all genders. But in the course of mobilizing members we understand that you have other functions to perform in the service of the

Party. For a long time now, the Women's Wing has been at the forefront to efforts to raise money for both the party and for charitable causes. Recently I was in Serowe officiating at your fund raising dinner. This is commendable. As I have always asserted, the party is not rich, and depends on its members to sustain it. The contributions made by the Women's Wing to the party every year do go some way in helping it to meet its obligations.

4. The 20th century has been a time of amazing change for women. When the century began, women in Botswana did not have even the privilege to occupy positions of responsibility, save in very stereotypical roles, from the Botswana workplace. Today, women still face the challenges of fairness and equity in their daily lives and in places of work. And for those of us in government, we must face these challenges by marshaling the resources of ALL Botswana, and not by excluding any segments of our society.

5. I have on many occasions called upon you to meet these challenges head on by voting yourselves into positions of responsibility like in Parliament and Councils, to create new institutions – institutions of the 21st century - that will serve as models for other democracies in the next millennium.

5. Personally, I am proud to serve as President who has placed more women in Cabinet-level positions than ever before in the history of our nation. We all know about, Nasha, Motsumi, Seretse, Venson-Moitoi, Mbaakanyi, Phumaphi, Kokorwe, etc, but we also have women as Attorney General, Bank of Botswana Governor etc These women are the leaders in their ministries and departments, which means they are having a greater and greater voice in the direction of our nation. The increased number of women at the mid levels means that there is a larger pool of qualified women in the pipeline to keep this trend alive. To advance their careers, women must have the opportunities to develop credentials, organizational knowledge, and management and executive competencies.

6. As the BDP government we have worked hard to make sure that departments and managers use the many options available for developing high potential of women, including the use of significant, high impact assignments; mentoring; formal career development programs; and lifelong learning programs. However the challenges especially of customs and traditions are abundant.

7. Ladies and Gentlemen, I must say, in Botswana, customs and traditions play important roles shaping the society. Customs and traditional practices constitute the foundations for the customary legal system, and permeate social norms which, accordingly, have an impact on the social structure of the society. This has implications on the women's human rights as they relate to sexual stereotyping and role differentiation among others. While this scenario holds for most societies, the traditional practices are also changing as development entrenches itself. There is also diversity of practices especially between urban and rural areas. This is partly due to urbanization and improvement in communication.

8. The constitution of Botswana guarantees protection to every person residing in the country regardless of race, colour, political affiliations and or social status. This translates to mean that both women and men are legally entitled to the rights and freedoms contained in the Bill of Rights, Section 3 of the Constitution that states that,

“Every person in Botswana is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say the right whatever his race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for public interest...”

9. The participation of women in decision-making at all levels of public and private life is important as an issue of human rights as well as for strengthening of the democratic process. Democracy requires that all participate in the making of decisions, not only at the national or public level, but at all levels including the so-called private sphere of the family. The reality in Botswana however, is that men wield most of the power at all levels of the society, from their positions as heads of the household making decisions over family resources, to their strong control and Local Government.

10. More often than not differences between women and men, which are socially constructed, are used as a mechanism to confine women to certain areas of activity. It is considered socially permissible for women to pursue activities representing an extension of their reproductive and maternal functions.

11. The Beijing Platform of Action (BPFA) of 1995 notes that unequal power relations prevent women from leading fulfilling lives at all levels of society, including the most personal and the highly public. It is in this regard that the Government of Botswana has embarked on a process of ensuring equal participation of women and men in national and local legislative as well as decision-making bodies through the gender mainstreaming exercise.

12. The Women's Affairs Department piloted gender mainstream in four Ministries between 2002/03. The four ministries were; Labour and Home Affairs; Finance and Development Planning; Local Government; and Trade and Industry. As part of the process gender policies and action plans for each of the ministries were developed. The Department is working in collaboration with the ministries in monitoring the implementation of the Action Plans. In 2005/2006 gender mainstreaming was further extended to the ministries of Agriculture and Education.

13. Beyond the ministries gender mainstreaming advocacy work is starting to bear fruits. Different government agencies have started mainstreaming gender as reflected in the Rural Development Policy, the Energy Policy, Sports and Recreation and Policy on Vocational Educational and Training.

14. While we have made progress women are still under represented in institutions of decision making such as Parliament, the Cabinet, and Local Authorities, the civil service and in most national boards. There has been a steady progress in these institutions except Parliament. For example although the 1999 general election witnessed an increase of female representation in Parliament and Cabinet, there was a significant decline during 2004 elections. The percentage of female Members of Parliament rose to 18% in 1999 and dropped to 11% in 2004. It is of paramount importance that our Party should adopt positive steps in involving women at decision-making level as stipulated by the theme of this forum, "***Unity and Hard Work towards 2009***". The Central Committee has tasked you, the Youth Wing and Political Education and Elections Committee to develop a model of inclusion.

15. As Government we will continue efforts of increasing female representation at all levels of decision-making positions at least to 50% by the year 2020 as mandated by the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (which is currently being reviewed into a Protocol) and the

Beijing Platform for Action. SADC recognizes the significant contributions that women have made to the income of their households as well as to the National and Regional economies as evidenced by various National and Regional research and statistics. In 1997 the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development was signed by heads of State and Government Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children was also adopted in 1998.

16. At National level, information dissemination and sensitization on gender issues has taken the form of annual campaigns and commemorations of important events such as the International Women's Day and Children. The Government of Botswana has continued to support these and other initiatives. The Government continues to provide financial, human and technical resources at all levels, including both urban and rural settings.

17. Botswana operates on the basis of Common Law and Customary Law respectively. The amendments made in the Common Law do not necessarily have effect on the administration of justice under the Customary Law. It will be noted that while certain practices have been abolished under the Common Law, this continues to discriminate and disadvantage women in comparison to their counter parts within the Customary Law.

18. Madomi a mantle, Our Party has adopted a constitution that empowers individuals to contribute towards policy formulation. It is against this backdrop that the Party has adopted participatory democracy in its constitution: It could however be that we are not reinforcing the constitution of the Party to the faithful and some thus tend to forget or take for granted the basic tenets of the Party, and for this reason I will like to once again capture some imperatives in our said constitution, particularly that have to do with policy formulation.

19. First however, I will start with the rights of members of the BDP. Our constitution stipulates among others that a member of the Party shall enjoy the following rights:

- (a) To question or criticize, within the institutional framework of the Party and within the bounds of decency and courtesy and not in any selfish, subjective or malicious manner the activities of any member of the Party, Party Officials or the actions of Government and administration of Botswana;

(b) To request the Party at all levels, up to and including the National Congress, to consider any question or petition provided that the prescribed procedures are followed.

20. We must therefore as BDP members understand our responsibilities as captured above and why such onerous and demanding tasks are placed on us as individuals. The object is to make the BDP a “leading political force in Botswana” which “shall continue to be a constructive organization, in which participatory democracy shall be maintained”. Further, and again as captured in our constitution it is for us as the BDP to “pursue a policy of equality, justice, liberty, solidarity, peace, political, economic and social progress and prosperity for the people of Botswana”.

21. This can only be achieved if the ‘common behavioral norms of any collective order are modeled in the likeness of the concept (or philosophy) of conditionally manifested reality that characterizes the collective generally’.

22. Thereafter, of utmost importance, is the organizational principles and structure of the Party, where “All decisions at any level of the Party, shall be taken democratically, save as specifically stated herein or in regulations made here-under. The decision of the majority shall prevail over that of the minority”. As be known to us all, the Country is divided into Regions, which are in turn, divided into Branches. The Branches are divided into Wards, and where appropriate Sub-wards and lastly Cells. All these Bodies ensure that the Party is represented at all levels in policy formulation and implementation amongst others, and thus reducing the possibilities of conflict, which could stifle progress.

23. The most overriding however, is for the Party to better manage the complex process of change as was noted earlier. It is known to us all, that there are organizations which are unable to manage this complex process of change, examples abound in this country and we must learn from them that failure to manage change could have dire consequences.

24. I need not tell you about the BNF factional bouts that resulted in the Party split, which lead to the formation of the BCP, and thereafter NDF. Having realized their mistakes, they are making all attempts to get together, but again they fail to learn from their past mistakes because of late they engaged in unsavory exchanges. I am just giving out this as a living example, ladies and gentlemen and that from here, we should always put the interest of the Party first, lest we would be letting Batswana down.

25. Having said this I now have the pleasure of declaring this congress officially opened.

Tsholetsa! Tsholetsa!