

WOMEN'S WING SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT LIEUTENANT GENERAL SERETSE KHANA IAN KHAMA

Salutations

1. As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Botswana Democratic Party and since this year also marks the International Women's Day centenary celebrations, I feel I should dwell on the role of women in this great party. From its very foundation the BDP realized the need to have an inclusive approach to its existence.
2. I would like us to take advantage on this Congress and use the time for reflection, self assessment and, above all to recommit to our long held goals and objectives as a party. Our objectives have always been to build a united Botswana where everybody, irrespective of gender or origin can contribute to the best of their ability, improving their own lives and those in the broader community.

3. From the days of its formation, when the party had no office, no vehicle, no paid staff, it was the members and I must point out, who were mostly women, who took care of party organization and mobilization. Women have been the pioneers of fund raising initiatives in our party, they have demonstrated a selfless volunteerism spirit whilst campaigning during elections. I can say without hesitation, that women have been the bedrock of the BDP and continue to have a very central role in the existence and success of the party. The strength of the BDP lies in the hands of the women and we rely on you to continue in this path. I take this opportunity to encourage the men of the BDP to play an even more active role in the organization, mobilization and marketing of the party instead of continuing to dwell in the knowledge that the women are doing a good job.

4. The role that women play within the BDP is a reflection of our society. However, it is women who are sadly, mostly affected by social ills but it is also women who are at the forefront of government efforts to fight those social ills. It is female-led families that are most affected by poverty and this was one of the factors that directed beneficitation of the

poverty eradication project to homes. The backyard garden has been selected as a fore runner in the poverty eradication drive since it targets the household and nutrition at base. The BDP government believes that if we improve food security and nutrition as the home level first, we will be on the right path for poverty eradication. I know that the opposition has decided to make a mockery of this project and I say this to you, research abounds, confirming that we are on the correct path. When families are fed well, only then can they productively participate in other activities that develop communities.

5. It is also women who are mostly exposed to gender-based violence. In order to root it out of society we need citizens across the social divide to help government come out with relevant mechanisms for counseling, guidance, assistance and care for those who find themselves in such abusive environments. I, for one, do not accept how it is possible for one to be abusive of those they claim to love. It can, therefore, only be a social ill that needs all of us to respond to with corrective remedies.

6. Women are the majority in the numbers of home-based caregivers. They are the majority in the number of adults looking after orphaned children. They hold the home responsibility to ensure that children, the elderly and the disabled are given care. I could go on and on, but the point I am making is that, we, too often, discount the time spent by women at home as if it has little value. It is quite clear that it is a solid and secure home that produces hard working and dedicated citizens. The care and support that women give should not go unrecognized in their role to hold society together.

7. My government and I are determined to make sure that we continue to create an environment conducive to the well being of women in this country. It is our commitment to ensure that they play an increasing role in all areas of development in government, the private sector and elsewhere.

8. As we gear up for 2014 as well as our 50th anniversary next year, we need to redouble our efforts towards ensuring that we get as many women through the primary elections as we possibly can. I continue to be concerned that despite

the fact that women continue to be active in politics in large numbers and that they contribute immensely to our party and nation, we continue to fail to demonstrate their level of participation by the very low numbers that ultimately stand for election in positions of political leadership. I know that for the 2009 elections, part of the plan of the Women's Wing was to identify those women who were intending to run for elections and to hold workshops for them in preparation for the elections.

9. You are aware that during those elections only two women stood for election at the parliamentary level. Even though we are proud of them that they both won their seats, this is hardly a number to be content with. Clearly, this is a big challenge for us as a party. It should be our aim, under the guidance of the Women's Wing, to increase the numbers of political representatives at both Council and Parliament. There must be something we are not doing right, we must identify that setback and work hard to address it. Only a disciplined approach, that is also focused, can yield the results we desire. All of us need to work hard and develop unity of purpose on this assignment. We all know that there

are many talented and able women in the BDP, we must seek them out and encourage them and give them support to participate in 2013.

10. As we deliberate on issues selected for this congress, please be assured of my support and that of my government in ensuring that more and more women get into politics at the decision-making level. We are renowned, as a party, for an unshakable winning spirit, let us rekindle that spirit to overcome this challenge. I wish you successful deliberations.