

BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

55th National Council



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE PARTY PRESIDENT
HIS EXCELLENCY
LT. GEN. DR. SERETSE KHAMA IAN KHAMA**

GABORONE
24 MARCH 2017

*"Our Structures; Our Strength – Another 50 years in Government
#Goyagoileng"*

The Party Chairman, Your Honour The Vice President;
Secretary General;
Treasurer;
Deputy Secretary General;
Deputy Treasurer;
MCC for Gaborone Region;
Other Members of the Central Committee;
Members of the Party Electoral Board;
Members of Sub – Committees of Central Committee;
Chairman of Gaborone Region and your Committee;
Honourable Members of Parliament;
Distinguished Guests;
Fellow Democrats;

Good afternoon to you all.

1. It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here today to address this 55th National Council of the BDP, whose theme is a continuation of what we discussed in the last year in the lead up to our country's 50th Independence Celebrations, aptly themed "***Our Structures; Our Strength – Another 50 years in Government #Goyagoileng.***"

2. This meeting is certainly very timely, for it comes immediately after our Youth and Women's National Congresses, whose outcomes will actually enrich our discussions here. This is one of the key meetings for the year that will feed into the National Congress on the 7th July this year.

3. In view of the fact that this is the first formal such meeting since the aforementioned congresses, let me take this opportunity to once more, congratulate those who were elected into Office at those gatherings. I have met with the Executive of the Youth, as I had promised to meet with the leadership of both groups quarterly, to hear first-hand their issues and suggestions and how those could be addressed. The Women's wing met last week in Maun, and they are still to come for their first meeting with me.

4. Having celebrated our 50th Anniversary last year as a nation, I wish to thank you as democrats and Batswana for your patriotism, displayed through among others, your wearing Botswana colours in the lead up to the Golden Jubilee Independence celebrations. I wish to underscore and remind you all that, whilst the actual day has passed, we still don our Botswana colours every Friday. I would, therefore, like to encourage you to continue with that tradition and also inform others to do likewise. We should not be like other politicians in opposition circles who forget that the National Day is

for all Batswana and who were actually calling for a boycott of that cherished and dignified occasion of BOT50.

5. The good thing is that they were rejected outright by even their own supporters for their juvenile antics, and deservedly so. It is important to note that at no point did we attempt to project the golden jubilee as a partisan activity. As the only political organisation to have governed the country and to whom all national achievements can be attributed, government made certain that every facet of the celebrations was inclusive and all embracing and hence there was no basis for anyone to mount a boycott campaign. Opposition politicians and some of their followers should not just oppose for the purpose of opposing, otherwise it loses meaning and Batswana and people in general will see them through their facade for what they really are, opportunists who have lost their ways and values in pursuit of political power with nothing to offer. Fortunately, there are one or two exceptions amongst them, one being the Mayor of Gaborone.

6. Our advice to them is that, they should be aware that Batswana will harshly judge them on their everyday conduct, including their dismissive attitude towards public state ceremonies such as Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day for the rains and others. I wish to highlight that whilst others are grappling with ideas of what official work of governance actually entails, the work

of building a nation and delivering development and social justice is never ending. That is why simultaneous to BOT50 we also launched our second national long term vision; ***Vision 2036***, which outlines how we intend to attain an even better Botswana in the coming fifty years when we celebrate the centenary of the founding of this Republic.

7. My advice to you democrats, is that we should never take for granted the privilege given to us by the nation to run their affairs. As a ruling political Party we exercise Government for the benefit of the people and nothing else. Contrary to what our detractors would want the nation to believe, our continued stay in power is a clear testimony by Botswana that we continue to make a materially tangible difference to their lives. It cannot be a mistake that for eleven consecutive elections the nation has wisely invested its political capital by returning us to office through popular mandate, making us the continent's longest serving democratically elected party. This is a track record democrats should rightly be proud of, because next to the many remarkable advancements in different development indicators, under our stewardship, a vibrant electoral democracy that has been nurtured and nourished to stand the test of time.

8. As a Party presiding over an equal opportunity government, that does not practice discrimination on any basis, including political

affiliation, we should congratulate ourselves that every single citizen of this country, including our worst detractors has benefitted from the democratic dividend in various forms. We feed them, we employ them, we educate them, we provide them with water and electricity and roads and health care and many others. However we often witness that opposition sympathisers try to sabotage and undermine government programmes and attempt to deny BDP supporters their rights. Should they ever be in government this country will be divided between us and them when it comes to job offers, programme beneficiaries and consideration for tender awards. In this year of the 55th anniversary of the founding of the Party, we had scheduled a major commemorative event for 4th of March in Serowe; Central Region. Due to the packed calendar of activities in the first half of the year, we have postponed the event to 26th August 2017 to allow time for a level of organization befitting the celebrations.

9. Turning to the National Council, this gathering affords us an opportunity to conduct a review of the policies and programmes of the Party and Government respectively in open and robust discussions. I must remind delegates that our debates must be characterised by mutual respect and civility. It is the mandate of National Council to set the policy agenda for the upcoming national Congress in July, at which the Party must define strategic objectives to take it forward to the 2019 general elections.

10. The role of the National Council is to advise on how to chart a way forward in dealing with new challenges thrown at us by the rapidly evolving political landscape. If we are in agreement that the BDP is the natural obvious and only capable Party of government, then it must show through our creativity to formulate policies that speak to the hopes and aspirations of our people. Every member of the Party, especially those that qualify for delegate status at national forums, is an integral part that makes up the Party machinery and must be encouraged to share and exchange ideas that will feed into our collective efforts.

11. In the 2014 general elections, some in the BDP, spilt our votes by those who could not accept the democratic dispensation within the Party and stood as independent candidates, thus dividing our vote.

12. We have interrogated the reasons for our performance and are more or less in agreement about what went wrong in the wards and constituencies we lost. Some factors were internal, including but not limited to, the problems of ***Bulela Ditswe*** and a general lack of cohesion among democrats. We also had to deal with external factors such as the effects of the economic recession which put a strain on government revenues and the resultant inability to fulfill the legitimate aspirations of vital sectors in the populace.

These experiences from 2014 have sufficiently informed us about what went wrong, and logically should assist us undertake due corrective action.

13. We must remain vigilant and acknowledge that in the present circumstances, this country cannot be subjected to an experiment of opposition rule. Simply put due to the fact that in comparison to opposition politicians of yesteryears, the current crop comprises impulsive individuals lacking in competency, maturity and strategic vision. Examples abound daily of how the current opposition cohort cannot be entrusted with managing the business of State and Government. It is now in the public domain and played out in various media how the so called umbrella project is coming up against strong headwinds barely before take off.

14. This continues to put in stark relief the risk Batswana will be taking by voting for the opposition. Our duty therefore as BDP is to caution our citizens that protest votes given to a clueless opposition might return to haunt them some day, albeit when it's too late.

15. My belief is that we are on course to return to office if we resolve the internal challenges in the Party because the outcome will be a performing government that will deliver to the electorate. As democrats, you must remember we are the only political formation with a nationwide organisational footprint, thus making

us an integral part of the fabric of the nation. Our roots are firmly embedded in society and it is the BDP that can through self-inflicted harm lose office.

16. Still on the point of internal development, I have, as you know, been engaged in structure building tours to all 14 regions of the Party twice and currently we are on the third leg. The purpose is to get first hand appreciation of the problems affecting local Party structures and how to resolve them. No less importantly, I also remind the same structures about their functions and duties as laid out in our statutes. A more comprehensive evaluation of the tours will be presented by the Secretary General.

17. We have no need to be reminded that we join the Party out of a spirit of voluntarism because we believe we can make a meaningful contribution to both the organisation and the country. It goes without saying that Party membership entails adhering to agreed rules and regulations. We cannot comply with rules in a selective manner, when it suits us and be inconsistent of what to comply with when we consider them a hindrance. I want to highlight the problem of concealing registration books by office bearers who by virtue of their positions should be registering all and sundry. It now seems to be more of a rule than exception that many democrats wishing to renew membership are being denied this right by registrars. Disturbingly, the exercise appears to be in

the capture of vested interests with designs and firm focus on Bulela Ditswe. This state of affairs is unacceptable and requires an effective solution now.

18. One must ponder the question; what is the point of capturing books to register only your supporters when during the general election you need the vote of every democrat? Conversely, how do candidates think they can go on to attract the support of those they excluded from voting in Bulela Ditswe? The unintended consequence is that those disenfranchised will either stay home or donate their votes to the opposition. The rules are clear in terms of how registration should be conducted and who the registrars are.

19. In the lead up to National Congress, we sent out a notice inviting expressions of interest for democrats wishing to contest the various Central Committee positions on offer in July. As was explained, this was merely an administrative exercise aimed at evaluating levels of interest. As has been clarified, democrats who opted not to file are still protected by Article 30 of the BDP constitution, which provides for nominations from the floor of Congress. But in line with the principle of consensus, the expressions of interest filed do also assist the Party in exploring the possibility of finding common ground between aspirants. We are at a delicate stage and can little afford damaging divisions in membership ranks given the crucial 2019 elections. Already I have

received reports of jostling for influence in regional congresses that preceded National Council. As we may all expect, the moment we depart Gaborone there will be an escalation in tension as aspirants tussle for delegates to National Congress, a situation which if not handled with care may revive factionalism with its worrisome implications for our cohesion.

20. Therefore as Party President in consonance with the agreed principle of consensus building and in our endeavour to promote Party unity and cohesion, I wish to ask all to encourage the candidates standing in each position to meet and agree on only one of them standing. Should this attempt find traction, it goes without saying that the 37th National Congress will be smooth. It would be a celebration of our unity.

21. In conclusion, let me wish you all the best in your lives, and once again take this opportunity to thank God for the wonderful rains He gave this Nation.