



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT
Lt. GENERAL SERETSE KHAMA IAN KHAMA

PRESIDENT OF THE
BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

TO THE

34th NATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE
BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

8 July 2011

[Salutations]....Fellow Democrats

1. It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to the 34th National Congress of the Botswana Democratic Party. I wish to extend a special welcome in recognition of our guests from ruling parties from our neighbouring countries and other Fraternal Parties from the SADC Region.

2. The biannual National Congress of our Party is an opportunity for us to take stock of our Party and national issues of the day. In addition to such introspection it also provides an appropriate platform for us to reaffirm and re-energise our collective commitment to the responsibility of leading our nation into further improving the lives of Batswana. Of course it goes without saying that it is also an opportunity to meet fellow democrats who come from all corners of the country to join in this common objective.

3. Perhaps such a purpose is beyond the grasp of some of our opponents who have been politically frustrated by Botswana's progress over the years under our prudent leadership.

4. In this respect they have been frustrated by nothing more than the simple fact that generations of Batswana have continued

to entrust us to lead our country forward. It is not by chance that we continue to enjoy the support, trust and confidence of the overwhelming majority of Batswana. Good governance, development, sustainable economic growth, care and management of our natural and financial resources, investment in education and human capital, social justice, peace and political stability, which has been the bedrock that have guaranteed the supremacy of our existence achieved through many successive victories at the polls in free and fair elections.

5. For our part let us continue to be humble in our dedication to build on the legacy of those who laid the foundations of our progress over the past fifty years. All in all, even from challenging periods that the BDP has gone through, we have learnt that we cannot fail if there is a strong commitment to serve the country and the people, and our leadership as a party continues to treat people with utmost care and respect, and unite them all behind one common purpose.

6. It is this visionary leadership of ours that reminds us that it was five decades ago that what was initially a small band of patriots began to come together with a shared vision of launching

a movement that would transform what was then a colonial Protectorate of tribes into a proud nation of citizens.

7. Next year we shall formally celebrate the outcome of their consultations when we gather to mark the 50th Anniversary of our Party's founding.

8. My fellow Democrats, we have come a long way in the decades since. All of us cannot help but have noticed that Batswana have become accustomed to progress under the BDP. We have built a strong, solid and sustainable foundation even when challenges are heaped upon us, as we march forward towards another electoral victory in 2014.

9. But, let us not take too much comfort in this. Let us rather recognise the fact that in a true democracy such as ours, past delivery will inevitably fuel expectations for greater accomplishments in the future. We should guard against complacency or over-confidence, and always look out for new external threats, hazards or new opportunities. Experience has shown in some organisations that over time, with great success, pride then turns into complacency and/or subtle arrogance.

10. As the only party of real democrats, let us therefore remain true to the vision as well as the legacy of our party's founders, for our country still needs true democrats, that is us in the BDP, to lead it to 2014 and beyond.

11. As true democrats we shall in this way set ourselves apart from those who pretend to be democrats among our political opponents.

12. Is it any wonder then that during the recent strike some of these fake democrats joined their other desperate comrades in becoming shameless cheerleaders for so-called regime change?

13. Should we be surprised that during the strike the leader of the BNF was seen pontificating about alternative routes to power other than the power of citizens freely casting their ballots?

14. I say once more because just days before the beginning of the strike the same BNF leader shared a platform alongside his other opportunistic BCP and BMD comrades to publicly proclaim that the opposition need not necessarily wait until 2014 to overthrow the popular outcome of 2009. When calling for a revolution, does he know what a revolution is? Of course he

does. It means bloodshed. He wants to spill Batswana's blood. He is bored with our peace. Leaving aside immaturity, can someone like this ever be trusted to lead this country with his Party – of course not.

15. As for his subsequent incitement, anyone can see him through the internet, speaking of the possibility of North African style regime change in our peaceful country. Botswana is not Libya and I am not Gaddafi. Our history of democracy is totally different from the dictatorship of Libya. Batswana will respond to what they experience as they should, but not on the call of perceived undemocratic governance.

16. We may therefore ask is the colour orange nothing more than a greatly watered down version of our own red passion for good governance and democracy with the longstanding yellowed agendas of others leaving them green with envy of our achievements.

17. Fellow Democrats, let us then not be deceived by our opponents subsequent denials. We all know that from the very beginning some among them conspired to hijack what had

been conceived as a legal strike into an instrument for their own political agendas.

18. Let us also not be shy about the fact that in every single general election the majority of voters have stood in queues to cast their ballots for our party:

- The party that has lifted this country to middle income status;
- The party that has provided them with educational and health services, roads and clean water, peace and stability.
- The latest Transparency International Corruption Perception Index has for the 15th year in a row ranked Botswana as being the least corrupt country in Africa, as well as among the least corrupt countries in the world, having moved up five places from the previous year.
- Continued confidence in our prudent management of the economy was also voiced last month by the IMF, along with Standard and Poors and Moody's Credit Agencies. The credit agencies both once more upheld our "A" level ratings as a sign of their confidence in our ability to manage our debt, while steering our economy back to full recovery.

- In its report Moody's further stated that our refusal to do the easy thing by giving in to a two-month strike by state employees and I quote "signals to us that the government is very serious about its budget strategy." End of quote.
- Last month we were also once more ranked as one of the world's most stable societies, as well as number one in Africa by the Global Peace Index, which assesses countries' political stability and wellbeing based on such criteria as levels of democracy, transparency, education and material wellbeing, respect for human rights and the rule of law, military expenditure and relations with neighbouring states. With a world ranking of 35 we were placed ahead of France (36) and well above such democratic friends as Brazil (74) and USA (82).
- The Global Peace Index, in particular, is a useful reminder of what we must preserve by firmly rejecting our frustrated opposition's talk of North African style regimes. Should we fail to uphold these qualities a tarnished international reputation may be the least of our worries. In their struggle to survive, one doubts that many Libyans last month noticed

that their country has dropped 83 places in the same index to join the likes of Afghanistan and Somalia!

19. We have never claimed to be perfect, but the majority of our own people, as well as informed observers from all corners of the world, have recognized and applauded our able and exemplary leadership which our political opponents and some in the media, time and again, clutching at straws, are blind to.

20. We should therefore remain forever steadfast in putting our country first and in defending our own democratic values and vision, while exposing -

- The hypocrisy of infantile Marxists who preach doctrines of class conflict, while enjoying the pleasures of their own bourgeoisie lifestyles;
- The sham of supposed democracy advocates who remain the praise singers for dictatorships elsewhere.

21. This, my fellow Democrats is the political mindset that turned a legal strike into an avoidable mess.

22. Let me also take this opportunity to refer to the misinformation put out on the part of some of our media. Contrary to what some may assume, we appreciate the fact that the news media is supposed to be a watchdog for our own good governance. However, when they become irresponsible, unbalanced or misleading they can cause damage to the reputation of our country as a whole as well as their own credibility.

23. In life there are always two or more sides to a story, which deserve to be heard. Innuendos, half truths and blatant lies is not journalism. During the strike what was observed was the tendency on the part of some to freely report rumours. I would like to acknowledge that others did act responsibly in seeking to first confirm the truth.

24. Most of our major private newspapers now also publish online, meaning that they are accessible to a global audience. This trend is reinforced by additional forms of new media, communicating the views of individuals as well as organizations. Let us therefore appreciate the fact that there are wider consequences that may negatively affect all Batswana when we become inaccurate or misleading in what we circulate online.

25. Who as an investor would feel comfortable coming to an “unstable situation” in the country? International investments would help create jobs and boost the economy and in turn create a rippling effect reaching out to all corners of the country raising living standards and allowing more projects to be fulfilled.

26. Let us desist from adopting what has become a pull our country down mentality. We all have a stake in protecting the good name of our country where it is deserved. Some in our media display the most unpatriotic tendencies possible and care less about wanting to contribute towards the development of this country. I say some, because not all are like this. It is unfortunate that those I am referring to are dedicated only to making profit at all cost with no regard to journalism ethics or patriotism. What should they be selling more, their country or their paper?

27. On the subject of the strike, let me share some information about the strike in order that you are better informed.

28. I certainly found it especially disheartening, disappointing and unacceptable that doctors, nurses and other health professionals found it fit to remain on strike to the detriment of patients in critical need of care. How can one who has taken the

Hippocratic Oath to protect the lives of those under his or her care, turn their back on their fellow human beings. This kind of inconsiderate behaviour and lack of compassion also goes against our culture as Batswana.

29. During the strike the patience, tolerance and goodwill of all Batswana was tested.

30. In this context were they wary of creating a bad precedent in the face of what had escalated into serious violations of the rights of others as well as the rule of law.

31. We have enacted legislation which is progressive in the labour and employment front geared towards the sustenance of good and harmonious industrial relations, maintenance of long-term industrial peace, and have extended under this Government the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining for the entire public service.

32. These new rights and freedoms allow unions in the public sector, in the event of a labour dispute, only as a means of last resort, to embark on industrial action where appropriate in pursuit of legitimate demands. These developments which

should support and strengthen the labour unions and their rights to properly organise are not of some right-wing Government which is anti-unions, the labour movement, or is by any means undemocratic. Nothing can be further from the truth. Our record speaks for itself. Of course – Government and the BDP care about the welfare and plight of all employees, and hence the creation of an enabling legislative environment for unions to exist and function in Botswana.

33. Yet as we must accept the fact that strikes can and do occur in a democracy, but the right to strike is not an end in itself. Strikes are expensive and disruptive not only for the employers and society, but when they occur and are not handled lawfully and responsibly - they are a blunt instrument that can hurt the striking workers badly, disrupt their lives and cost them dearly in loss of pay and benefits. With regard to the rest of society, as innocent third parties, they become victims in disputes in which they have no part. This is why, consistent with relevant ILO protocols, we have laws in place for proper and orderly management of industrial action.

34. Unfortunately in the just ended public sector strike, some decided to forgo these safeguards. As a result the democratic and legal right of workers to go on strike became corrupted by

instances of a breakdown and erosion in the rule of law such as in the disregard and ignoring of court orders, vandalising of public property and sporadic incidences of violence, most of these encouraged and supported by opposition parties hoping to win support that they failed to achieve at elections.

35. This is what can happen when some begin to play political games in the name of the workers at the workers expense, as well as that of the country as a whole.

36. Within the existing legal framework, strikes are not meant to be political in character, and if they do degenerate into political strikes as witnessed recently, even under the ILO Conventions, they then fall outside the scope of freedom of association. For example, section 5 (5) of the Public Service Act of 2008 introduced by Government, and the very instrument extending these rights and freedoms to the civil service, strictly prohibits public service employees to *“publicly speak or demonstrate for or against any politician or political party”*.

37. In my last State of the Nation Address I made it clear that your Government (and I here quote) “recognises a

continuing need to work alongside the trade unions.” End of quote).

38. I also warned that for partnership between Government and the Unions to succeed, as is provided for in our current legislation, and I quote

“We should all remain focused on the common interests of workers by avoiding extraneous and divisive agendas, including partisan politics. Unions must leave politics to politicians and concentrate on workers welfare.” End of quote.

39. Today, I wish to point out to labour leaders to appreciate that the common interests of their constituents, do not lie in the purely partisan interests of any political party.

40. I say this notwithstanding the fact that the legitimate aspirations of workers shall continue to enjoy the sympathy and support of the BDP, which has always been at the forefront of promoting their long-term interests. Indeed, the BDP Government does not see trade unions as enemies but as allies with whom the development of this country is anchored.

41. What has recently divided Government from some of the Unions has not been any lack of sympathy on our part. We all very much appreciate the fact that inflation has eaten away at the earnings of Government employees. It is also a reality that every Motswana and every household is facing at the moment, employed and unemployed alike. Therefore it is not that the Government does not know the effects of inflation on ordinary households, including public sector employees, and that there is a need to increase salaries, but we are without means to increase them in our present economic and financial circumstances.

42. That the cost of living is a burden for workers and their families is undeniable. But, what is also undeniable, given the latest Budget figures, is that Government's cash flow remains in deficit as we struggle to find funds to preserve employment and provide necessary social support, while continuing to stimulate the economy as a basis for ensuring long-term sustainable growth. We cannot as a Government with an impeccable track record of fiscal discipline and sound economic management capability, just throw caution to the wind, and embark on steps that would leave us living beyond our means by incurring levels of debt which will

place a huge strain on our already fragile fiscal position arising from the recent world economic down-turn.

43. As the Minister of Finance and Development Planning reported in his budget speech during the last financial year Government spent a total of 40.5 billion pula, which was 10.2 billion pula above revenues received. Though the preliminary final 2010/2011 figures show a deficit of 8.5 billion Pula the point here, is that our budgeted expenditure exceeds the levels of our income.

44. The deficit for the current financial year is projected to be about 7 billion pula. These figures are on top of the significant revenue shortfalls that were already recorded since the beginning of the economic downturn in 2008, which total 23 billion Pula.

45. While sometimes unavoidable in the short term, such deficit spending is never sustainable. Countries like individuals cannot survive, much less prosper, by spending more money than they earn. In hard times responsible Governments, like families, must make hard choices about their spending priorities. With no money sufficient to at least meet our spending needs, we will be fool-hardy as a country, unless we are now running a house of cards economy, to go and

borrow or incur debt in order to finance the payment of public sector salaries.

46. It would have been politically convenient for us to have bought short term popularity by conceding to the Unions' initial demands for a 16 per cent raise. But, we are painfully aware that such a step would have had negative consequences for the sustained recovery and future growth of our economy. This would negate our past and present good policies as the BDP and Ruling Party rooted in strong, committed, honest and exemplary leadership, which has spearheaded sustainable economic development in this country. It would go against my own principles and pledges I made to Botswana since I took office as President set out in the vision of the 5Ds.

47. The root of our predicament should be clear. Who does not by now know that in 2008 Botswana, along with the rest of the world, was severely impacted by the global economic downturn? Our economy contracted due to a sharp decline in mineral demand. This setback, along with a corresponding fall in customs revenue, inevitably led to a decline in state revenues. The magnitude of the turbulence and wreckage that was left in the wake of the financial melt-down meant that most economies

around the world simply evaporated. Botswana is not an island, like other world leaders who assumed office in 2008 and after, my Government, like the rest of the world, has been faced with the daunting task of rebuilding the economy.

48. As a result, we found it expedient to delay the introduction of NDP 10 to allow for a reprioritisation of our spending. Otherwise worthy projects were cancelled or deferred. No portfolio was spared.

49. We were not, however, willing to simply slash spending to match revenue. The impact of the downturn would undoubtedly have been far greater had we failed to also introduce stimulus measures, while allowing already budgeted for infrastructure to proceed.

50. To avoid increased unemployment we further combined compassion with sound economic reason in rejecting calls for a sudden downsizing of the public service, in contrast to the pattern elsewhere. In so doing, we were mindful of the impact on our society and the numbers of people that would lose their jobs. We chose to retain everybody even if it meant no salary increases or adjustments because that option did not put anyone out of work.

51. Our current public sector wage bill is approximately 14 billion Pula per annum, which represents 43 per cent of Government's total recurrent expenditure and exceeds the 10 billion Pula allocated for development projects, meaning, we spend more money on wages than on developments which benefit the entire population.

52. Wage restraint has, in fact, become a major challenge for countries around the world including those with much higher incomes than ours. As a result wage freezes and conditional increments are now commonplace. In many countries including at least half of the EU member states wages have even been cut as have public service employees.

53. In hard times a BDP led government is moreover bound to do its best in serving all Batswana, not just those who work for it. The public service represents about 7 per cent of our population but get 35 per cent of our total budget. In comparison those who are at the poverty level are estimated at 23 per cent of the population down from 30 per cent in 2003 but we are spending this year only 2.5 per cent (1 billion) of the budget on them. This difference has to be addressed in the coming years. We have to ensure the total

budget benefits all Batswana and not just a few. There should also be a realisation that the Government cannot solve all our problems, but it should do that we cannot do for ourselves; that is, protect us from harm by providing security and law enforcement, provide every child access to education, keep our public health system functioning, provide clean water, invest in electricity generation and water resources, education, infrastructure projects, science and technology.

54. Initiatives such as Ipelegeng, which provides a lifeline for up to 50,000 people a month, the internship programme and youth empowerment initiatives were launched to provide immediate assistance. Temporary support was also openly extended to some private sector businesses.

55. In addition to stimulating the economy, while protecting key industries and jobs in the private as well as public sector our spending priorities have been to:

- Maintain infrastructure along with basic services, including our costly commitment to provide ARVs and other life saving medications;

- Preserve security in the face of both traditional and emerging criminal challenges; and
- Eradicate abject poverty while maintaining our current social safety net, including support for orphans and the destitute.

56. To further promote grassroots economic development we also funded ISPAAD, which resulted in an expansion of agricultural production after years of relative decline. Over 100,000 farmers currently benefit from the programme.

57. In the shadow of load-shedding urgent priority was given to the development of new energy sources, which besides addressing immediate shortfalls contribute to economic diversification.

58. We also remained steadfast in working towards our Millennium Development Goals, such as achieving universal access to safe water and proper sanitation as well as health and education; while continuing to soften the economic burden of all Batswana by subsidising fuel, water and power, whose costs would otherwise be much higher.

59. Fellow Democrats, from the beginning of the recession we have been candid with Batswana that the need to preserve jobs and stimulate the economy would result in budget deficits, which would have to be reduced once the economy began to recover. With further reference to my last State of the Nation address, it was clearly stated that:

“While we are in a position to finance these deficits with our own resources and borrowing, there is a need for continued spending restraint moving forward. It is our goal to restore a balanced budget by the 2012/13 financial year, while thereafter achieving surpluses for the remainder of NDP 10. This will allow us to rebuild our reserves, while keeping within the spending guidelines already approved by Parliament.”

60. It is most unfortunate that some opposition MPs who sit in Parliament today seem to have forgotten what they heard only yesterday, just as they have seemingly also forgotten the budget numbers and spending priorities that they themselves approved in the weeks just before the strike.

61. Some may have even forgotten the simple fact that deficit spending is about borrowing money against the prospect of future earnings. They should know from their own lives that incurring

ever increasing debt is not sustainable. Nations, like individuals, cannot survive, much less prosper, by forever spending more than they earn.

62. Under the BDP, Government has always exercised prudence in its fiscal policy. We have thus never borrowed beyond what we can afford to pay back; and I shall not be the first to break this rule.

63. My Administration shall remain committed to ensuring that Botswana does not sink any deeper into debt by ever allowing recurring expenditure, including salaries, to be financed by borrowing or the further drawing down of our national reserves. The work of running a government admittedly is not easy, and the challenges we face today require honest and steadfast leadership as often my Government and I are called upon to make tough choices and decisions. This is a new world where change in the economic landscape can be so sudden, and change is occurring all the time in this increasingly inter-connected global economy supporting giant flows of trade and information. The major impact to our economy from the

collapse of the developed financial markets is a living fact that we cannot wish away.

64. Any borrowing we go into should be reserved for capital projects for national benefit and not for individual consumption.

65. As it is we have never run a deficit as high as the one we have had over the last two years, further increasing that deficit would be irresponsible on our part.

66. My fellow Democrats, our own track record of good governance attests to the fact that government has often reviewed and restructured salaries and conditions of service whenever the economy demanded it and awarded increases if budget allocations permitted.

67. As we move forward let us appreciate the fact that any future salary increments will also have to be tied to our economic performance. That the wage bill is too high and so is the size of our public service. This will have to be addressed in the coming years.

68. In the meantime we can expect that our opportunistic opposition will continue to ignore simple mathematics by making such blatantly false claims that they could finance a 16 per cent raise.

69. Even more absurd has been the suggestion that we could finance a salary adjustment by eliminating such relatively small budget items as the constituency based sports and cultural initiatives that continue to enrich the lives and create opportunities for tens of thousands, and provides for some the only means of livelihood.

70. Some of our misguided opponents even accuse my Cabinet colleagues and I of wasting money by going around the country speaking to rural people including the less privileged and elderly at dikgotla!

71. Once more ignoring the absurdity of their maths, such characters also forget that under the BDP, Government has a responsibility to consult with all Batswana to ensure delivery in the rural as well as urban areas. The BDP has a strong tradition of participatory democracy and consultation at levels of public life from the villages all the way to central government of Kgotla meetings, which has enhanced public

accountability of this Government from the time of independence to date.

72. Although this long-standing history and tradition of participation and consultation has maintained the link between every Motswana and their duly elected government, we have an even greater responsibility to address the needs of the poor, underprivileged and less educated among us. All have a right to be heard.

73. Our country is currently at an economic crossroads. We are gradually coming out of the worst effects of recession, but our recovery remains fragile especially as the world economy seems to be slowing down again.

74. Finally I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank all who showed their concern about the strike by offering their advice and in some cases mediation.

75. We must also thank the majority of civil servants who did not go on strike but remained on duty. The fact that they did not strike does not mean they would not have liked a 16 per cent increase. Unlike others on strike they showed they understood

the economic situation and therefore the unnecessary need to strike but to be patriotic, disciplined and not selfish. The following are definitions of the three;

Patriot

- A person devoted to his or her country
- A person ready to support or defend his or her country
- Devoted to the well being or interest of ones country

Discipline

- Controlled and orderly behaviour

Selfish

- Concerned with ones own personal advantage or welfare to the exclusion of regard for others.

76. As a Patriot you care for your country. If you are disciplined you don't get involved in lawlessness and selfish people don't care about others like patients and students, the poor and the unemployed. When you are driven by self interest you will resort to anything to get what you want and to hell with anyone else. Just how much do we love our country, do we

understand patriotism in the same way? When we act or pronounce on anything do we consider the effect of our act on others, or how they reflect on them? When our people engage in open lawlessness, what does this say of us as people? When public utilities are destroyed by us do we realise the cost to our economy?

77. Another element of our values is respect. Respect means being polite and considerate to one another and to our country. Let us be civil to each other, and each one of us should use whatever gift he or she has to serve your country and others. I am appealing to you all as Batswana to exercise self control and desist from the culture that “it is all about me” and avoid insulting and use of abusive terms and language. It is quite normal for people to disagree without using hate speech or assassinating each other’s character. This caution I also extend to the youthful leadership of opposition parties. God opposes the arrogant, but gives Grace to the humble, all of you must clothe yourselves with humility towards one another.

78. Finally, the Government will pay a 3 per cent increase effective September 2011. However, Cabinet has resolved that this increase will not apply to them nor should it apply to

Members of Parliament and Councillors. As the political leadership we must lead by example. Even the 3 per cent is unaffordable, that is why we have chosen to opt out.

79. Coming to this Congress now, at the Council meeting of March 2010, following a Retreat intended for us to reflect on the status of the party, we took the decision that all elections for party structures, following that Council meeting, would be conducted on an inclusive method to help give the party time to reflect on our unity, to heal and build within. This National Council Resolution was taken in accordance with Article 16.4 of our Party Constitution.

80. I take this opportunity to congratulate both the Women's and the Youth Wings on their success in applying this method to select their current committees.

81. The resolution had stipulated that the last such election would be the July 2011 Central Committee election. I am hopeful that fellow democrats, will, for the sake of our Party and in the spirit within which it was adopted by the National Council, still be committed to the resolution we made at that Council which we will be placing before Congress at this

meeting for adoption and implementation at the election that will take place in the next day or two.

82. In preparation for this Congress, I requested the Party Chairman that we should ask you, members of our Party, to offer your services to serve in the Central Committee so that the compromise list would be drawn primarily but not exclusively from names of people who had so offered. We received several names.

83. The list may not include your preferred candidates, but given the amount of work that has gone into its production, I urge you to consider it for adoption as our list of nominees for the 2011/13 Central Committee. The Secretary General will give you more information on the names and on the state of our party during his address.

84. It is now my singular honour and privilege to declare this the 34th National Congress of the Botswana Democratic Party officially open. **TSHOLETSA! TSHOLETSA!**