



Republic of Botswana

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY Hon. DITHAPELO L. KEORAPETSE,
MP, SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ON THE OCCASION
OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE
SECOND SESSION OF THE 13TH PARLIAMENT**

**THEME: 'Consolidating and Reinforcing Botswana's Democratic Legacy
through Parliamentary Transparency, Accountability and Public
Understanding'**

PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, GABORONE

13 JULY 2026 | 1400HRS

SALUTATIONS

- Mr President, Advocate Duma Gideon Boko
- The Vice President, Hon. Ndaba Nkosinathi Gaolathe
- His Lordship the Chief Justice, Gaolapelwe Gee Ketlogetswe
- The Speaker of the National Assembly of Botswana – Hon. Dithapelo L Keorapetse
- Honourable Justices of Appeal and Judges of the Superior Courts, serving and retired
- Their Excellencies, Former Presidents of the Republic of Botswana, Dr. Seretse Khama Ian Khama and Dr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi
- Former Vice President, Hon. Slumber Tsogwane
- Honourable Ministers
- Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Helen Pushy Manyeneng,
- Assistant Ministers here present
- Leader of the Opposition - Hon. Dumelang Saleshando,
- Honourable Members of Parliament
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Chairman of Ntlo ya Dikgosi, Kgosi Malope II
- Members of Ntlo ya Dikgosi
- Permanent Secretary to the President – Ms Matshidiso Bokole
- The Attorney General- Mr Dick Bayford
- Judge President of the Industrial Court-
- Ombudsman –
- President of the Court of Appeal
- Service Chiefs
- The Mayor of the City of Gaborone

- Clerk of the National Assembly, Dr. Gabriel G. G. Malebang,
 - Former Speakers of the National Assembly – Dr. Margaret Nasha and Hon. Phandu TC Skelemani,
 - Parliament Partners, and Sponsors
 - Accounting Officers and Senior Government officers
 - Deputy Clerk – Ms Ketshajwang Dikgokgwane
 - Parliamentary Counsel – Dr Ame R Masuku,
 - Distinguished Guests
 - Members of the Fourth Estate
 - Fellow Citizens of Botswana
 - Ladies and Gentlemen
-
- Dumilani bathu be ndzimu
 - Dumelang ba Gaetscho
 - Thobela,...Re a locha
 - Harumere
 - Murumere
 - Go Rumelwe
 - Xhaio
 - Masekati a ka naka

Good afternoon,

1. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow, according to Melody Beattie. Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to God All Mighty for this wonderful day and thank him for the wonderful gift of life, for his unfailing love and for his grace and mercy. I recognize the masses of our people of this great republic and extend my warm gratitude

to them for their fortitude, hope and courage and their patriotic spirit.

2. Let me thank President Advocate Duma Gideon Boko SC, for his stewardship, forthright leadership, and commitment to serve our country with distinction, honour, dignity and respect. We thank his Second in Command, the man who sits at the helm of our economic high command, His Honour Ndaba Nkosinathi Gaolathe, for devoting every effort of body, mind, and spirit to turning around our economy into a prosperous one that works for all and that honours the dignity of work.
3. Thank you to my wife, Katlego, who has always understood and shared my conviction. Remarkably, she continues to support and love me. For that I'm eternally grateful. Thank you, Hon Members, for your continued support and for the work that you do for this country. Let me also thank our staff under the leadership of the Clerk; let me thank them most profusely for their wonderful service to our nation. I thank you all for being here.
4. Mr. President, Honourable Members of parliament, distinguished guests and fellow citizens watching from across the nation: it is with a profound sense of responsibility and a deep respect for the sanctity of this chamber that I welcome you to the inaugural official opening of the Third Meeting of the Second Session of the 13th Parliament.
5. I acknowledge all of you here, and in the words of former Leader of Opposition (LOO) and now President Advocate Boko, I encourage honourable members "from across party lines to

embrace each other without paying any regard to the temporary barriers of party lines or, indeed, the temporizing agonies of your separation from each other." I "look forward to that point in your journey when you will all reunite and refuse to remain imprisoned in any entrenched divisions."

6. We begin, as this House has always begun, with humility before providence and in solemn memory. In recent months, we have lost some of our own: Rre Festus Gontebanye Mogae, whose steady hand guided this nation through years of consolidation; Mme Gladys Kokorwe, who once sat in the Chair I now occupy and whose grace defined the dignity of this office; and Reverend Dr John Seakgosing, whose service to this country was quiet but unwavering. We pay homage and tribute to Ernest Siphon Mphahlele, the former Clerk of the National Assembly.
7. Through them, we remember the wider company of those who built this House from nothing: Sir Seretse Khama, who anchored our democracy in consultation rather than command; P.G. Matante, who taught this Parliament that opposition is not betrayal but duty; Sir Ketumile Masire, who proved that prudence and progress need not be opposites; Kgosi Bathoen Gaseitsiwe, who carried tradition into modern governance without letting either diminish the other; Dr. Kenneth Shololo Goabamongoma, whose intellect disturbed complacency wherever he found it; Gaositwe Tseke, Same Makgoa Bathobakae, Kebatshabile Dikale, Maitshwarelo Dabutha and Paul Rantao among others, whose long

service in this house is testimony that serving ones country is a virtue.

8. Honourable Members, we do not inherit their standing. We earn it only by matching, in our own time, the seriousness with which they treated this House. We remain firmly committed to building a Parliament that is strong, effective, and truly accountable to Batswana. As Winston Churchill eloquently stated, *"Parliament is the workshop of democracy; that workshop must remain open, vibrant, and responsive to the people's needs."* This institution serves as the heartbeat of our democracy, and its strength directly reflects the vitality of our nation.
9. I have encouraged all political parties represented in this 13th parliament to walk confidently and courageously through the open door into this chamber and present their well thought out proposals and ideas with an open mind, have their political, economic, social, and other ideas critically tested for their utility, their realism, their adaptability, and the extent to which they are workably applicable in our context.
10. I congratulate the new government for anchoring their governance on human rights, for protecting free speech, and for recognizing the right of citizens to associate, assemble, protest, and petition, including the right to picket.
11. I also congratulate the Opposition for holding the government to account. I thank the media for their wonderful work of asking third-degree questions and adhering to responsible journalism. I urge the citizens to continue to hold accountable their elected representatives without fear or intimidation.

12. On the Debswana World Athletics Relays: it was a magnificent job well done by the athletics association, particularly the LOC, BNSC & Ministry of Sports and Arts. Congratulations to the Ministry of Minerals for putting together a fantastic sponsorship programme for World Athletic Relays. Congratulations to Team Botswana, led by Letsile and Kebinatshipi amongst others, for a great job. They continue to shine at the Diamond League. Congratulations to the boys and their coaches and Batswana for collective support; infrastructure development grew, tourism grew, and our diamonds received huge mileage—this was indeed the true spirit of IPELEGENG.
13. Dear colleagues and friends, the change that took place in October 2024 was unprecedented in the sense that it evoked high expectations. These expectations must be borne and executed by the leadership chosen by the people. This change should be felt, fundamental in form and shape, drastic in its nature and impactful in its execution. The change must first be felt by those that caused it. The role of leadership is to make change tangible, drastic, and meaningful to the lives of ordinary people, the people that made it happen.
14. The people who subsist at the margins; workers; students; teachers; soldiers; police; mine workers, the marginalized, differently abled people; women, young people, factory workers, small businesspeople; old-age people; and street hawkers—must feel this change. The arms of government, the judiciary, the legislature and the executive must espouse and encapsulate that change, by configuration and design, by form and shape. These

arms must demonstrate that there is change; they must represent the aspirations and wishes of our people. This earth-shattering change wasn't apologetic; it was drastic and devastating. This change can't be cosmetic.

15. It was a historic change that requires a complete overhaul of the system to ensure that the change captures the desire by those that brought it about. If you do not change, the confidence in leadership will suffer. Make changes that will advance the country and the people's aspirations. Do not apologize for making changes. In driving this change, let's desist from hedging and prevarication; let's not be dazzled by the uncomfortable truth's bright headlights. Let's avoid euphemisms and pussyfooting; let's discourage isomorphic mimicry where there's temptation to create an illusion of reform to satisfy external observers—an illusion that we are busy doing something when we are busy making sure nothing is done.
16. As the 13th Parliament, let's take heed of Chinua Achebe's call that "Every generation must recognize and embrace the task it is peculiarly designed by history and by providence to perform." Let's be a generation that democratizes its Parliament, that sets profound yardsticks for accountability and transparency, and that truly and adequately represents its voters. Let us recognize that, as Wole Soyinka said, the greatest threat to freedom is the absence of criticism," and let's have that one abiding religion—human liberty.

THE RATIONALE OF OFFICIAL OPENING OF PARLIAMENT'S LEGISLATIVE BUSINESS - THE THIRD MEETING OF THE SECOND SESSION OF THE 13TH PARLIAMENT

17. Honourable Members, distinguished guests, we are gathered here today in a ceremony Botswana has never held before. Twice each year, this Chamber fills for occasions that belong, properly, to the Executive: The State of the Nation Address, in which the President sets the Government's programme; and the Budget Speech, in which the Vice President and Minister of Finance account for the nation's finances. Both matter greatly. Neither, however, is Parliament's own occasion.
18. Until today, Parliament had no equivalent moment for its own core function: the making of law. No day on which the Speaker, the Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition, the Whips, and the Members who will spend the coming months undertaking their core lawmaking duties stand together and say to the nation, in effect, "This is what we intend to do with the authority you gave us, and we intend to be watched while we do it."
19. This ceremony required no amendment to our Standing Orders, only the will to establish it, which the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition, together with the Office of the Clerk, have shown by making today possible. Mr. President, you have on more than one occasion called on Parliament to be more preoccupied with its core mandate of lawmaking. Let today be this House's answer: not a speech about lawmaking, but an institution

that opens its legislative meeting the way it opens every other kind of meeting, in public, on the record, before the nation it serves.

20. This is the Third Meeting of the Second Session of the 13th Parliament of the Republic of Botswana. In the parlance of the Commonwealth parliamentary tradition, this designation carries profound symbolism. The "Session" of Parliament is the constitutional period during which the Legislature meets to discharge its duties, beginning with the State Opening and ending with prorogation or dissolution. Each Session represents a fresh mandate to legislate, oversee the Executive, and give voice to the aspirations of our people. The Second Session, therefore, represents a continuation of the legislative agenda first set in motion, a reaffirmation of the mandate bestowed upon us by the electorate, and an opportunity to deepen our legislative footprint.
21. The "Third Meeting" within this Session signifies the third formal parliamentary sitting convened to advance our legislative agenda. In the Commonwealth parliamentary procedure, each meeting is a building block, a structured opportunity to deliberate, debate, and decide upon matters of national importance. This meeting is not merely an administrative convening; it is a living expression of the consensual understanding between the Government and the governed, the sacred covenant that defines our republican democracy.

22. As the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) reminds us, the strength of a democracy lies not in the grandeur of its buildings, but in the robustness of its parliamentary procedures and the integrity of its elected representatives.
23. This inaugural official opening of Parliament's legislative business represents a deliberate institutional statement that the legislature ought not be an appendage of the Executive but a co-equal branch of Government, operationally independent and constitutionally empowered. In this, we draw inspiration from the wisdom of Professor Larry Diamond, who observes that *"democracy requires more than elections; it requires the institutionalization of checks and balances, the protection of minority rights, and the cultivation of a culture of accountability."* *"Today, we are not merely opening a meeting; we are opening a new chapter in Botswana's journey of democratic consolidation.*
24. As the French Philosopher Baron de Montesquieu aptly observed, *"when the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person or body of magistrates, there can be no liberty."* This profound insight underscores our duty as Parliamentarians to uphold and preserve the delicate balance enshrined in our Constitution. It is this balance that ensures that our democracy remains vibrant, our freedoms protected, and our institutions resilient against any concentration of power that could jeopardize the liberties of our people.

25. In my previous statement marking my one year as Speaker, I emphasised our commitment to fostering a robust legislative environment. Honourable Members, as part of our continued efforts to enhance the legislative process and deepen parliamentary democracy, the practice has since been that all Statutory Instruments drafts be scrutinised by the Committee on Subsidiary Legislation before they are tabled in Parliament. Furthermore, all Bills, policies, and papers shall be thoroughly examined by the relevant Parliamentary Committees prior to their presentation to the House. This will not only improve the quality of our laws but also reinforce our oversight function.
26. Moreover, we seek to strengthen public participation in the law-making process by allowing members of the public to engage in Committee hearings dealing with Bills and policies. This participatory approach will enrich debate, promote transparency, and ensure that laws and policies are the outcome of a plurality of voices.

A SYNOPTIC HISTORY OF THE PARLIAMENT OF BOTSWANA

27. Honourable Members, to understand where we are, we must first understand where we have come from. The Parliament of Botswana was born at independence in 1966, inheriting a constitutional framework shaped by the wisdom of the Marlborough House negotiations, and the foresight of our founding fathers.

28. From the very first Parliament in 1966 to the 13th Parliament today, we have maintained an unbroken chain of representative governance that places us among the most consistently democratic nations in the world. That unbroken continuity is our pride; it is also our responsibility to preserve it.
29. Expectations of this House have never been higher, and they should not be lowered to make us comfortable. A Parliament born of a historic democratic moment owes that moment more than gratitude. It owes it distinguished service.
30. In the words of the great African statesman Julius Kambarage Nyerere, *"democracy is not a destination but a journey."* It is a continuum, a work in progress. Botswana's journey has been remarkable. At independence in 1966, we were a nation of humble means, yet our forefathers planted democratic roots that would grow into one of the most enduring and stable democratic systems on the African continent.

THE HISTORIC 2024 ELECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BOTSWANA'S DEMOCRACY

31. Honourable Members, the 2024 General Elections were not merely an electoral contest; they were a stress test for Botswana's democratic institutions and a reaffirmation of the democratic temperament of Botswana. For the first time in nearly six decades of independence, the electorate delivered a change of Government at the ballot box, not through a single seismic event,

but through the patient accumulated effort of citizens exercising their franchise in villages, towns, and cities across the country.

32. The implications of this outcome are profound. They demonstrate that Botswana's democracy is not only durable but dynamic. They prove that the people, in their collective wisdom, can and will hold governments to account. They confirm what the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has consistently observed: that democratic consolidation is not about the absence of alternation in power but about the capacity of institutions to manage alternation peacefully, constitutionally, and without disruption to national stability.
33. The IPU, in its global reports on parliamentary democracy, identifies the peaceful transfer of power as a core indicator of democratic maturity. By this measure, the 2024 elections place Botswana firmly among the upper echelons of African democracies. The IPU's 2023 "Global Parliamentary Report" highlighted that parliaments in young democracies are most tested when power changes hands. Our Parliament has passed that test.
34. We did not merely witness a change of Government; we managed it with the dignity, the order, and the constitutional fidelity that befits a mature democracy. Botswana's vibrant democracy indeed has truly passed the "Huntington test," a testament to our maturity as a democracy.

35. Following Botswana's historic political transition in October 2024, Parliament is the primary venue for peaceful debate and national cohesion. This is because constructive cross-party engagement reinforces stability and public trust. Matters of national interest, which could potentially escalate and find expression in overt and at times violent conflict, are openly debated and ventilated peacefully and constructively. Ultimately, from that contestation of ideas, the best quality policies and ideas prevail and serve the best interests of the nation. This Parliament is therefore uniquely placed to become a transformational Parliament.

THE SPEAKER'S VISION: TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENT

36. Honourable Members, if we are to understand a vision as a word picture of the future that is pleasing. What then is the Speaker's vision? It is not a personal ambition but an institutional aspiration. It is the vision of a Parliament that is independent, inclusive, and citizen-centered. The vision of the National Assembly is clear: to build an open parliament that is accessible, responsive, participatory, and citizen-centered. At the heart of this vision lies a profound belief that a stronger democracy is achieved when citizens are not merely observers of governance but active participants in shaping it.
37. We aspire to transform the Parliament of Botswana into a high-performing institution. In an endeavour to reform Parliament, we strive to strengthen the institutional capacity of Parliament.

Learning and striving for excellence should be a lifelong objective. The current leadership aims to reform and transform Parliament to meet the changing demands of society and the world. Within 20 months, the 13th Parliament has managed to re-align its leadership philosophy and has shifted its focus from administration to strategic delivery with the aim of improving transparency, accountability, agility, and stakeholder confidence.

38. The quest for a democratic, independent Parliament is not an abstract ideal. It is a constitutional necessity. A Parliament that is financially dependent on the Executive cannot independently scrutinize the executive. A Parliament that lacks its own legislative drafting capacity cannot independently make laws. A Parliament that is deprived of its own Parliamentary Budget Office cannot independently scrutinize the budget. Independence is not a privilege to be granted; it is a capacity to be built.
39. Former President Sir Quett Ketumile Joni Masire, Botswana's second President and a paragon of democratic stewardship, once said, "A nation that does not invest in its institutions is a nation that mortgages its future." We honour his legacy not by erecting statues, but by strengthening the oversight mechanisms that he championed. We honour him by ensuring that every Pula entrusted to government is accounted for, that every project delivers value, and that every tender is awarded fairly and transparently.

40. The Setswana proverb, "Tshwaragano ke maatla" — unity is strength — reminds us that our strength as a nation lies in our togetherness. But unity is not passive. It is the active engagement of all segments of society in the project of nation-building. Inclusive democracy means that minority voices are heard; that women's representation is not tokenistic but substantive; that youth participation is not symbolic but strategic; and that persons differently abled are not afterthoughts but integral partners in our national development.

TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENT

41. During the 18th-century Age of Enlightenment, the traditional authority of the church was undermined by groundbreaking scientific discoveries, and the idea of monarchs ruling by divine right was called into question. In Europe, particularly France, many political philosophers began to investigate the power of the monarchy, clergy, and aristocracy. Foremost among these were Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Montesquieu.
42. Rousseau argued for power to be shifted from the monarch to the people, and Voltaire contended for a separation of church and state.
43. Montesquieu was more concerned about the existence of a constitution that would protect against despotism. This was achievable, in his view, by a separation of powers of government. He argued that despotism was the single greatest threat to the liberty of citizens. As our President always reminds us, President Duma Gideon Boko, the worst perpetrator of human right

violations is the state itself, and that citizens must be protected from the government through not just laws but creation of key institutions such as the Constitutional Court or words to that effect. At the heart of Montesquieu's argument was the division of a state into three distinct categories: the executive, responsible for the administration and enforcement of laws, the legislature, responsible for passing, repealing, and amending laws; and the judiciary, responsible for interpreting and applying the laws.

44. This distinction between the three different arms of governmental power, known as the *trias politica*, wasn't new, as Ancient Greeks and Romans had recognized this need. Montesquieu's influential ideas became a model and foundation of many constitutions around the world, and the tripartite system is enshrined in most democratic constitutions, including that of Botswana. These ideals serve as a basis for democratization of our country and should still inform our comprehensive constitutional review and institutional reform process.

45. Like you, Mr. President, we are dreamers. I am a dreamer. I dream a spectacularly different Parliament. A modern twenty-first-century Parliament that is independent, well-resourced and capable of providing effective oversight, legislate for democracy and good economy; that enacts laws from an empirically informed position and represents Botswana adequately.

46. At its core, democracy is the system of government in which supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them

directly or indirectly through a system of representation, as we are here representing the people, typically involving periodically held free elections.

47. But as the political theorist Robert Dahl reminds us, democracy is not merely about elections. It is about the capacity of citizens to hold their leaders accountable, the protection of fundamental rights, the rule of law, and the institutional architecture that makes accountability possible.
48. Parliament, in this architecture, is the heart of democratic governance. It is the institution entrusted with making laws, scrutinizing Government actions, representing the voices of citizens, and safeguarding constitutional governance.
49. Section 57 of the Constitution of Botswana establishes Parliament and Section 86 grants Parliament the power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of Botswana. This is not delegated power; it is sovereign power entrusted to the representatives of the people.
50. A democratic Parliament is more than a legislative factory. The IPU and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) have established what we might call the "gold standards" for democratic parliaments.

51. These include: representative composition reflecting the diversity of society; institutional independence from the executive; effective oversight of government; transparency in operations; accessibility to citizens; and the capacity to draft legislation rather than merely ratify executive proposals. The CPA's benchmarks for parliamentary performance assess parliaments against these criteria, and the IPU's "Parliamentary Cycle" framework evaluates how well parliaments represent, legislate and oversee throughout their mandate.
52. Trends on democratic parliaments in Africa, as observed by the IPU, reveal both progress and challenges. The IPU's 2023 analysis noted that African parliaments have made significant strides in legislative independence and committee strengthening, but remain constrained by executive dominance, limited budgetary autonomy, and inadequate research capacity.
53. The IPU's *"Tools for Parliamentary Oversight"* guidelines emphasize that parliaments must have their own analytical capacity, their own budgetary independence, and their own mechanisms for public engagement if they are to function as genuine democratic institutions rather than rubber stamps for executive will.
54. Botswana's Parliament has historically ranked well on democratic indices, but we must not rest on our laurels. As Professor Larry

Diamond warns, *"democracy is not self-sustaining; it requires nurturing, defending, and constantly renewing."*

SHORTCOMINGS OF BOTSWANA'S PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM

Honourable Members,

55. Our Parliament faces a number of challenges as outlined in a book by one of my predecessors, the former Speaker, the Right Honourable Matlapeng Ray Molomo. His analysis, was driven by a deep respect for our Parliament and its potential, he identified the following key issues:

- (i) Executive Dominance over our Parliament characterized by intensified fusion of executive and legislative powers, which results in a blurred distinction between the two.
- (ii) Weak Parliamentary Committees: A Lack of institutional independence hinders effective oversight by our parliamentary committees.
- (iii) Lack of Independent Budget Analysis: The absence of a Parliamentary budget office leaves Members with no alternative but to rely solely on information from the very ministries they oversee, thereby reducing their oversight function to mere observation.

56. All these structural gaps compromise the exercise of oversight by Parliament over the Executive, legislative independence, and by

extension effective representation of the people who elected them to Parliament.

57. These shortcomings are not abstract academic concerns. They manifest in daily institutional life, for example, Parliament's proposed funding remains a small fraction of the National Budget at just 0.2 percent of the overall budget.

58. This includes a recurrent budget of P206 million, barely 0.2 percent of the P91 265 983 275 billion total, and a development budget proposal of P8 million, which represents a marginal 0.03 percent of P23.38 billion in the 2026/2027 financial year. Such figures starkly illustrate the constraints under which this institution operates.

59. Constituency offices remain under-resourced, limiting the MPs' ability to serve citizens effectively. A Parliament that lacks resources cannot fully discharge its constitutional mandate nor provide the representation, rigorous oversight, and policy leadership that democracy demands.

60. Although the above may be the case, I sincerely thank the current Government for their openness and willingness to support some of our aspirations for an independent institution. This has been demonstrated through the significant, though modest, action of granting Parliament permission to open the Office of the Buyer, who independently oversees procurement of goods and services here at Parliament. With the allocation of a separate Buyer who for

now we share with another government agency, we expect that this will greatly enhance the speed and efficiency of our procurement processes.

THE 13TH PARLIAMENT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Honourable Members,

61. The 13th Parliament comprises 69 Members of Parliament, including the President and the Speaker. However, the composition reveals both continuity and concerning trends in our democratic representation.
62. The current Parliament includes only six female MPs, representing 8.7% of the total membership—a decline from the nine female MPs who constituted 11% of the 12th Parliament. This 2.3 percentage point decrease **is a blemish** on women's representation and represents a step backward in our journey towards gender equity in political leadership. Of the current membership, 21 are returning MPs (20 male and one female), indicating a significant turnover from the previous Parliament.
63. Consequently, 46 first-time MPs (41 male and five female) now serve in this chamber, underscoring the urgent need for intensified capacity-building initiatives to support and encourage female representation within this honourable House.
64. Furthermore, the low number of women MPs significantly affects decision-making on issues that impact women, both within

our Oversight Committees and in Botswana's representation in inter-parliamentary bodies. The absence of diverse perspectives can lead to policies that fail to address the nuanced needs of our population, thereby undermining the principles of inclusive governance.

65. Botswana has a very small parliament not reflecting its population of 2.4 million and over 580 000 square kilometers geography. A quick comparison in the region shows that Mauritius has 70 MPs with a 1.2 million population; Namibia has 104 MPs with approximately 3 million people; the island of Seychelles has 35 MPs with 132,000 people; and Lesotho has 120 MPs with 2,3 million population. Therefore, Botswana needs at least 100 MPs especially given its geography, given that some wards have radius of 80KM while some constituencies have a 300 km radius. Simply put, the burden placed on a Motswana MP is huge. It's difficult and costly for MPs to meet with their constituents. For instance Hon. Kapinga, Member for Okavango West's one way fuel cost is P3200 one way driving between 12 and 13 hours. Hon. Dikoloti's Constituency has 21 wards including 55 villages.

66. Reflecting on the past 20 months, we acknowledge that the 13th Parliament's journey began amidst significant fiscal challenges. The new Government assumed office under strenuous economic conditions, a fact highlighted on numerous occasions. Yet, as I have consistently emphasized on previous occasions, "Our

strength lies not in avoiding challenges but in confronting them with unity and resolve.

Welfare Challenges

67. Special rights and privileges protect MPs from undue external pressure, but challenges remain. Beyond their tenure, many politicians struggle with employability, and their retirement benefits often fall short of ensuring dignified lives. It is in this regard that we have initiated a process to register a National Assembly Credit and Cooperative Society, commonly known as SACCOS, with the assistance of the SACCOS umbrella body in Botswana, the Botswana Savings and Credit Cooperative Association (BOSCCA). Membership of the society will be open to serving MPs, former MPs, current and former staff, and their families. This is intended to encourage a culture of saving among MPs and improve their financial literacy, as well as to give them access to credit based on affordable terms.

68. Given that MPs are not easily employable upon leaving political office due to the misunderstood nature of their roles and limited opportunities in the job market, this initiative aims to provide them with financial stability and support during their transition period after public service. We have also initiated discussions with other partners in finance, asset management, and insurance to train MPs in financial literacy and to explore the possibility of curating tailor-made fiduciary and long-term investment solutions for MPs. We thank, among others,

Masheleng, Minet, Mmila Fund Administrators, and SACCOS Botswana.

69. Furthermore, speaking during the recently held pre-legislative capacity-building workshop, some experts highlighted the need for healthy lifestyle practices among MPs, emphasising the urgent need for them to adopt healthier lifestyles and holistic wellness. The demanding nature of political duties often leads to neglect of personal well-being, contributing to health-related issues. It is, therefore, imperative to integrate wellness programmes and promote a balanced lifestyle to enhance not only the personal health of MPs but also their productivity and longevity in service.

70. The limitations on our parliamentary independence exacerbate the above challenges. With a minuscule share of the national budget, as indicated earlier, Parliament is constrained to improve both MPs' and staff's welfare.

71. Despite these fiscal constraints, Parliament has achieved commendable economic milestones, a testament to our prudence and robust resource mobilization efforts through strategic partnership engagements. The 13th parliament has also been able to pass 53 bills since its inception in November 2024 to date.

Parliament Oversight

72. Our parliamentary committees have diligently convened numerous meetings with their respective Ministries and stakeholders, ensuring robust scrutiny, transparency, and accountability in government operations. In the past two months, the Committees on Statutory Bodies and State Enterprises and the Committee on Government Assurances undertook rigorous examinations of State-Owned Enterprises, Government Ministries and agencies.
73. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is scheduled to resume its examinations tomorrow, demonstrating Parliament's steadfastness in its duty to monitor performance, demand accountability, and safeguard the public interest.
74. With the Committee on Government Assurances, for instance, the last examination of Ministries was conducted in November 2020, interrogating progress made on the floor of the House in response to questions or motions passed by the National Assembly. Today, the Committee faces a backlog of Assurances from 2019 to 2024 (12th Parliament), which presents a mammoth task. The scale of this responsibility requires diligence, discipline, and institutional commitment. Yet oversight cannot be effective without adequate resources, and here Parliament faces its greatest constraint.
75. Parliamentary committees face several significant capacity constraints that hinder their overall effectiveness. One of the

major issues is the limited expertise among Members and Staff. Currently, there are 29 committees, and unlike other parliaments where a committee Clerk typically services one committee alongside officers specialising in areas such as budgeting, research, legal matters, and expert advice, our system places the burden of all these responsibilities on a single committee Clerk.

76. In fact, one Clerk may be responsible for up to seven committees, which severely impacts continuity and efficiency. This situation often leads to scheduling conflicts, with meetings clashing and the committee Clerks struggling to manage the overwhelming workload.
77. Additionally, there is a notable staff shortage, particularly among committee Clerks who are shared across several committees. This not only stretches their capacity but also limits the support that each committee receives, undermining the quality of parliamentary work. Another critical issue is the lack of quorum, frequently caused by members serving on multiple committees. This over-extension hampers effective sittings and decision-making processes.
78. Budgetary limitations further constrain the operations of these committees. Financial restrictions limit the frequency and length of meetings, site visits, consultative tours, and facilities inspections, which are vital for informed decision-making and oversight.

79. Moreover, the practice of members serving on more than one committee leads to a loss of specialisation. Members are unable to develop deep expertise in specific areas, which diminishes the overall quality and effectiveness of parliamentary proceedings. Addressing these capacity constraints is essential for enhancing the functionality and impact of parliamentary committees.

80. Honourable Members, the National Assembly is currently facing the following legacy issues and systemic challenges:

- **Limited capacity** in the passing of laws, scrutiny on the national budget (Budget office) and inadequate consultation with civil society organisations.
- **Limited resources** (equipment, financial & human capital), which limits operational capacity and affects service delivery. Legal Officers, Public Relations, IT, and Finance are all seconded from other Ministries and government agencies. As you can tell, these are core departments that are vital for the running of parliament. Since decisions pertaining to the deployment, progression, and welfare of the seconded officers are taken elsewhere, parliament's business is often disrupted and constrained by this anomaly. It is necessary for these departments and personnel to be fully incorporated and integrated into the structure and establishment of parliament to enable parliament to function optimally and seamlessly.
- **Limited opportunities** for staff growth and professional development are impacting retention and capacity building. This

has led to inadequate skills, knowledge, and technical expertise and has over the years hindered the creativity and modernization of efforts.

- **Inadequate integration of performance Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)** such as planning, budgeting, absence of standard operating procedures (SOPs), guiding manuals, handbooks, tracking tools, dashboards, Roadmaps, checklists, and frameworks.
- **Inadequate ICT infrastructure and systems:** Currently, Parliament is using obsolete and performance compromising systems for the recording of Parliament proceedings. There is also a need for the upgrading of existing systems and the acquisition of additional systems such as legislative tracking tools, Institutional Repository (IR) mechanisms, and an intranet facility.
- **Gender equality:** Limited inclusion of women in Parliament, which makes gender equality central to ensuring that formulation, adoption, and implementation of policies, strategies, and programmes are undertaken in an inclusive manner.
- **Facilities inadequacies** – Parliament facilities are dilapidated and are therefore not sufficient to accommodate activities such as this very important national ceremony, meetings, and seminars; hence, the need for expansion and continuous renovation to maintain a higher asset value.

81. These constraints have significantly limited our ability to adapt, innovate, and effectively manage the transformation

required for institutional excellence. This calls for the initiation of a clear strategic framework, dedicated change management capacity, and robust strategic partner collaboration.

82. Achievements: Progress Toward Our Vision

Mr President, Honourable Members, Distinguished guests, over the past twenty months, our collective efforts have been firmly directed toward tackling these challenges. Several significant milestones demonstrate our commitment to institutional transformation:

83. Capacitating MPs and Staff

Recognizing that a strong Parliament requires well-equipped legislators and support staff, we are committed to continuous professional development and skills enhancement for both MPs and staff. Just a few days ago, we had a pre-legislative meeting capacity-building workshop for MPs, and another one a few weeks ago for MPs and staff, demonstrating Parliament's dedication to fulfilling its promise of Pillar 1.

84. Through strategic partnerships, we have facilitated fully sponsored international and regional missions and capacity building platforms for MPs and staff. A total of 14 MPs, 6 Members of Ntlo ya Dikgosi, 32 members of staff have undergone fully sponsored short-term capacity-building training in China, estimated to have cost around BWP 5.5 million. Similarly, both MPs and staff have also benefited from the ITEC scholarships made available through the generous support of the Indian government

to date. One 1 MP and 9 members of staff, recently underwent fully sponsored capacity-building training in India, estimated to have cost around BWP 971, 640. 13 (Nine Hundred and Seventy One Thousand, Six Hundred and Forty Thousand and Thirteen Thebe). MPs have also been able to attend the US Embassy-sponsored International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) at an estimated cost of BWP 2.1 million.

85. Moreover, I, together with 3 MPs, was fully sponsored to attend the Fourth Dialogue on Exchanges Conference in China. We have also secured sponsorship for our MPs and office bearers to attend meetings, notably fully sponsored by the National Parliaments of India, Morocco, and Turkey early this year.

86. These experiences have provided invaluable opportunities for experiential learning, bench-marking against global models, absorbing best practices, and developing critical competencies—all made possible by the generosity of our local and international strategic partners.

87. Change Management and Quality Assurance

88. We have embarked on a comprehensive change management process, beginning with a strategy aimed at enhancing the efficiency of our systems and processes within the Botswana Parliament. Consultations with the Botswana Bureau of Standards are underway, with a view to acquiring ISO 9001

accreditation and certification for Parliament and all its operations, including the legislative process itself.

89. The new leadership has exploited several "low-hanging fruits" by developing Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs), mapping processes, reviewing systems, and implementing tracking tools, checklists, roadmaps, accountability matrices, and dashboards. Additionally, specialized task forces have been established to improve organizational efficiency and ensure timely task execution.

90. Operational Improvements

The capacity of the Office of the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, and Leader of the Opposition has been significantly bolstered with the introduction and recruitment of Executive Support Officers. These roles were absent in the previous parliaments. Their presence reflects a deliberate investment in the leadership of this institution, ensuring that its custodians are equipped with the professional support necessary to discharge their duties with efficiency, dignity, and accountability.

91. Staff Progression and Staff Movements

For many years, Parliament has been faced with the challenge of movement of staff across different cadres. Since the beginning of 2025, there have been about 58 new appointments and 34 promotions, with a total staff movement of 92; further strengthening our institutional capacity.

92. Resource Mobilization and Strategic Partnerships

Recognizing that sustainable transformation requires diverse partnerships, we are actively cultivating stronger relationships with our partners. Ongoing and planned actions include bilateral engagements, targeted portfolio committee engagements, and vital inter-parliamentary exchange programs.

93. Indeed, it is now common knowledge that the economy is not doing well. This now requires us and other government institutions alike to become innovative in attaining our mandates. Honourable Members, it is my distinct honour to say that we are among one of the institutions that has taken heed of the President's call to adopt austerity measures.

94. Achieving financial sustainability requires creative approaches to resource mobilization and strategic partnerships that reduce dependence on single funding sources. In the past year, we have embarked upon a rigorous resource mobilisation drive, and our strategic partners, both at home and abroad, have steadfastly demonstrated a profound commitment to our developmental agenda.

95. In line with the above, on 25 September 2025, we proudly hosted our inaugural Strategic Partner Dialogue, marking a significant milestone in our vigorous resource mobilisation efforts. I am

delighted to share with this esteemed gathering that this initiative has borne remarkable fruit, culminating in valuable partnerships.

96. Furthermore, it has paved the way for impactful capacity-building initiatives tailored for both Members of Parliament, Members of Ntlo Ya Dikgosi and staff, fostering growth and development to date. Through the support of our partners, we continue to champion efficiency and innovation, upholding the principles that guide our progress, despite economic challenges.
97. For the 2025 pre-winter training seminar, we received contributions amounting to P1,068,400 (One Million and Sixty Eight Thousand, Four Hundred Pula), enabling us to build resilience and sharpen our institutional capacity. The end-of-year team-building activities which for the first time in history brought together MPs, Members of Ntlo ya Dikgosi and Staff Members under one roof, were similarly supported through generous donations and sponsorships from several partners.
98. In 2026, our partners once again stood with us. For the pre-budget meeting, we raised P140,000, complemented by in-kind support for internet provision. This year's pre-winter meeting saw P294,600 being raised for the MPs' capacity-building workshop, again with vital in-kind support for connectivity.
99. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) notably pledged P540,541, facilitating a pivotal capacity-building

workshop focused on enhancing Parliament's role in promoting democracy, accountability, and developmental outcomes. Similarly, UNDP Botswana has contributed an impressive P1,216,216 (One Million, Two Hundred and Sixteen Thousand, Two Hundred and Sixteen), providing technical support for the 2026 pre-budget seminar, pre-legislative meetings, and consultancies on parliamentary reforms.

100. For this very ceremony, our partners once again responded generously, pledging P201,000.00. Additionally, through the generous pledges from donors, we have successfully facilitated and implemented critical office repairs and renovations for our office bearers, amounting to P1,054,000.00.
101. I am pleased to note our continued efforts to strengthen Botswana's democracy. The Parliament of Botswana, in partnership with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Botswana Centre for Public Integrity (BCPI), and the European Union (EU), recently convened a Joint Oversight Workshop themed "Bridging the Gap: Parliament and Civil Society" in Lobatse.
102. This workshop brought together Members of Parliament, civil society organisations, governance stakeholders, and development partners to enhance our joint commitment to accountability, transparency, public participation, and democratic governance.

103. This collaborative effort reflects the essence of our democracy — where Parliament does not operate in isolation but thrives through active engagement with civil society. Such partnerships are critical in reinforcing the values we hold dear: transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance. The Bridging the Gap Project also provides a timely opportunity for a formalised structure for civil society to engage with Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Committees. It is our hope that these formalised structures will minimise the antagonistic posture often adopted by non-state actors in their dealings with parliament and the government of the day. There will also be a symbiotic relationship where accurate information will be shared by both parties, hopefully improving the quality and accuracy of public discourse in this age of fake news.
104. The Bridging the Gap Project was launched on the 23rd of April 2026 here on Parliament grounds and has been sponsored to the tune of P2,000,000.00 by the European Delegation to Botswana and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Botswana Office. The operational mechanism for the project comprises of Joint Oversight Clinics between MPs and Civil Society groups, Collaboration Frameworks as well as a Joint TaskForce of MPs and CSOs, which is tasked with implementing their joint roadmap during the life of the project.
105. Honourable Members, the lessons and insights from the Joint Oversight Clinics will serve as guiding principles in our legislative processes, ensuring that the voices of Botswana are not only

heard but also integrated into the decisions and laws that shape our nation.

106. In the same vein, I would also like to mention the recent appointment of Honourable Victor Phologolo, Member of Parliament for Kanye West, as the new Chairperson of the National Technical Working Group (NTWG) for the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), HIV/AIDS, and Governance Project. His appointment arrives at a pivotal juncture in the project's implementation, reflecting a renewed commitment to addressing critical health and governance issues.
107. This project, implemented through a formal agreement between the National Assembly of Botswana and the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF), signed on 29 January 2026, strives to strengthen the legislative, budgetary, oversight, and representative capacities of Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Committees, with a specific focus on SRHR. Ms. Mosarwa Segwabe, an experienced SRHR and HIV/AIDS Researcher based within Parliament, serves as the central coordination point for the project's daily activities, ensuring seamless execution and strategic alignment.
108. Integrating discussions on SRHR, gender equality, youth development, and gender-based violence stands central to the project's objectives. This approach highlights our collective responsibility to cultivate inclusive legislation that upholds the

dignity and rights of every citizen. Parliamentarians maintain active engagement with their constituents, rigorously reviewing legislative proposals and policy initiatives that influence SRHR, tackle early and unplanned pregnancies, enhance maternal healthcare, and support key populations.

109. In the same vein I congratulate other MPs and a Member of Ntlo ya Dikgosi who were elected to different positions at IPU: Hon. Maipelo Mophuting-Dikoloti, CPA; Honourable Letlhogonolo Barongwang, PAP; Kgosi Mosadi Seboko SADC PF; Hon. Helen Phusie Manyeneng, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, and Hon. Dumelang Saleshando Leader of Opposition. The following were elected to lead some key committees of the institutions.

110. Parliamentary Diplomacy and Stakeholder Engagements

Since the inauguration of the 13th Parliament in November 2024, there have been more than 35 official courtesy calls and high-level bilateral engagements between the Parliament leadership and foreign dignitaries, ambassadors, high commissioners, and parliamentary delegations.

111. These included landmark visits by the President of India, Her Excellency Smt. Droupadi Murmu, who addressed Members of Parliament during her State Visit in November 2025, as well as courtesy calls by High Commissioners, Ambassadors, and Heads of Mission of many nations, including India, the United States, Japan,

China, France, the European Union, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Kenya, Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Germany to mention but a few. Other visitations included parliamentary delegations from Mongolia, Canada, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and other regional and international legislatures.

112. On the 13th May 2026, the body of the late former President of Botswana, Festus Gontebanye Mogae lay in State in the Parliament Chamber and multitudes of Batswana lined up to pay their last respects. In a similar sombre and symbolic gesture, scores of Batswana had also lined up to sign a condolence book also in the parliament chamber during the period of mourning. The two activities saw our parliament hosting dignitaries such as former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano, former Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete, Zimbabwean Vice President Kembo Mohadi and Zambian Vice President, Mutale Nalumango among others.

113. These sustained engagements have significantly strengthened parliamentary diplomacy, expanded Botswana Parliament's international profile, and deepened bilateral cooperation.

114. Importantly, these relationships have translated into tangible benefits for Parliament, including increased technical cooperation, capacity-building programmes, institutional support and donor funding from development partners such as the European Union, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), the Embassy of the People's

Republic of China, the Embassy of India, the SADC Parliamentary Forum, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Inter Parliamentary Union and other international partners, thereby enhancing Parliament's institutional development and its ability to effectively serve the people of Botswana.

115. Honourable Members, as you are aware, Parliament, as a member of Inter-Parliamentary Bodies such as SADC-Parliamentary Forum, Pan-African Parliament (PAP) IPU CPA, Parliamentary Association of the Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States, provides MPs with opportunities to engage in parliamentary diplomacy, knowledge sharing on best practices, and capacity building for quality legislation and oversight. Membership of these bodies also provides a platform for MPs from all over the world to discuss and address global issues collectively.
116. Still in the spirit of innovation, resource mobilisation, and considering austerity measures, we have been able to attend the Commonwealth Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC) 2026 in India, again through the generous support of the Indian Embassy in facilitating sponsorship for flights and accommodation. The same can also be highlighted for the IPU Assembly 2026 in Istanbul, Turkey, demonstrating Parliament's commitment to resource mobilization
117. These concerted efforts reflect the innovative measures our institution has embraced to support the government's fiscal

shortfall, showcasing our commitment to sustainable development and prudent financial stewardship.

118. Opportunities for Parliamentary Reforms

Botswana's Parliament currently operates within an administrative and human resource framework that remains constitutionally structured and embedded in an executive-controlled civil service system.

119. This arrangement, inherited from the Westminster model at independence, constrains Parliament's institutional independence, limits its capacity to attract, develop, and retain specialist staff, and creates a structural dependency on the executive that is inconsistent with Parliament's constitutional role as an independent branch of government. These constraints are increasingly visible in the context of Botswana's fiscal consolidation, economic diversification agenda, and rising public expectations for legislative accountability and oversight.
120. In this regard, we must draw inspiration from the advocacy of former Speaker Dr. Margaret Nnananyana Nasha, who unequivocally championed the cause of parliamentary independence. Her unwavering commitment to ensuring that Parliament operates free from undue influence serves as a guiding principle for our reform efforts.
121. Honourable Members, true parliamentary independence requires a robust Parliamentary Services Commission and an autonomous

Parliament Budget Office. These institutions are pivotal in safeguarding Parliament's operational freedom, enabling it to secure appropriate resources and manage its affairs independently.

122. Equally, our outdated Standing Orders need to be reviewed to streamline committee systems and plenary debates, ensuring agility without compromising quality. Modern parliamentary reform is not about abandoning tradition; it is about refining our mechanisms to function effectively within a complex, modern state. The legitimacy and success of these reforms will depend on the extent to which they reflect the needs, expectations, and experiences of the people.
123. Furthermore, we must look at the moral compass of this institution. The establishment of a Code of Conduct and Ethics for Members of Parliament is an essential safeguard for public trust. By codifying our ethical expectations, we signal to the people of Botswana that this Parliament is governed by unimpeachable integrity. This is not merely a procedural reform; it is a moral commitment to transparency, accountability, and dignity.
124. There is a pressing need for a Public Participation Law, one that compels Parliament to consult key stakeholders in the process of lawmaking. Accessibility must extend beyond physical entry into parliamentary buildings. It must encompass access to information,

opportunities for meaningful participation, and the assurance that citizen's voices truly matter.

125. A modern Parliament cannot design reforms for citizens without involving citizens. Public participation and stakeholder engagement must therefore become integral components of institutional reform, not afterthoughts.
126. We envision a Parliament that actively listens, communicates openly, and creates multiple avenues through which citizens can engage with parliamentary business. Whether through Committees, public consultations, digital platforms, outreach programmes, or partnerships with civil society and other stakeholders, citizens should be afforded opportunities to contribute throughout the policy and legislative cycle.
127. This is the essence of an open Parliament: one that is not only transparent in its processes but also inclusive in its spirit, where governance is co-created with the people, and democracy is strengthened by the voices of those it serves.
- 128.** The IPU rightly observes, *"democracy is founded on the right of everyone to take part in the management of public affairs; it therefore requires the existence of representative institutions at all levels and, in particular, a Parliament in which all components of society are represented and which has the requisite powers and means to express the will of the people by legislating and overseeing government action."*

PARLIAMENT, VISION 2036, AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

129. Honourable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, the theme of this address is not merely a rhetorical flourish. It is a roadmap. **"Consolidating and Reinforcing Botswana's Democratic Legacy through Parliamentary Transparency, Accountability and Public Understanding"** is a call to action rooted in our national development philosophy.
130. It aligns seamlessly with Vision 2036, our nation's blueprint for prosperity, which envisions a high-income, knowledge-based economy underpinned by robust democratic institutions. Vision 2036 reminds us that sustainable development cannot be achieved in the absence of democratic governance, and democratic governance cannot thrive without a Parliament that is transparent, accountable, and accessible to the people it serves.
131. Botswana's National Development Plan (NDP) 11 and 12 both emphasize inclusive growth. Parliament must be the engine of that inclusion. We must ensure that our laws do not discriminate, that our policies do not marginalize, and that our budgets do not exclude.
132. The Committee on Gender, the Committee on Youth, and other thematic committees must be empowered to produce reports that drive legislative change. Parliament must be a beacon of inclusivity, a place where every Motswana, regardless of their station in life, can say, "My voice matters here."

133. In Setswana tradition, we have a saying: *"Mafoko a kgotla a mantle otlhe."* The words of the kgotla are important; a person can be saved or condemned by words. This idiom captures the essence of parliamentary deliberation. The kgotla was our indigenous institution of governance, where issues were debated openly, where every voice mattered, and where decisions were reached through consensus.
134. Parliament is the modern expression of that kgotla tradition. But like the kgotla, it must remain a place where words matter, where debate is robust, and where decisions are made in the full light of public scrutiny.
135. In Setswana, we also say, *"Kgetsi ya tsie e kgonwa ke go tshwaraganelwa."* This speaks to the collective responsibility we bear in safeguarding our national resources. Financial accountability is not the sole preserve of the Auditor General or the PAC; it is a shared obligation of every Member of Parliament, every civil servant, and every citizen.
136. When we scrutinize the budget, when we question the allocation of funds, when we demand performance audits, we are not being obstructive. We are being patriotic. We are ensuring that the taxes of our people — drawn from the sweat of the farmer, the toil of the miner, and the ingenuity of the entrepreneur — are deployed for the public good.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: CALL TO ACTION

137. Honourable Members, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, a ceremony is only as serious as what follows it. What should follow this one is simple to state and harder to do: a legislative agenda pursued in public, a Parliament that drafts and does not merely receive, an institution built to outlast any single government, and a House that looks, by the close of the 13th Parliament, more like the country it represents than it does today.
138. Let me pay tribute to those who have brought us to this moment. I pay tribute to the founding fathers of our Republic — Sir Seretse Khama, who envisioned a democratic, non-racial, and prosperous Botswana; Sir Quett Masire, who consolidated our institutions and steered us through regional turbulence; Festus Mogae, who championed HIV/AIDS response and national resilience; Lt. General Dr. Seretse Khama Ian Khama and Dr. Eric Keabetswe Masisi, who continued the legacy of service.
139. I pay tribute to the unsung heroes — the Clerks of the National Assembly, the researchers, the Hansard reporters, the security personnel, and the maintenance staff — whose daily work sustains this institution. I pay tribute to the Members of Parliament past and present, across the political divide, who have defended this House and the Constitution it serves. I pay tribute to the people of Botswana, whose patience, resilience, and democratic temperament have made this country an oasis of stability in a complex world.

140. As former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, famously said, *"All politics is local."* But in our interconnected world, all politics is also global. Botswana's democracy is not merely a domestic achievement; it is a continental example, a Commonwealth model, and a global testament to what African nations can achieve when they commit to governance by the people, for the people.
141. Honourable Members, the Third Meeting of the Second Session of the 13th Parliament is not a routine convening. It is a call to action. It is a call to consolidate our democratic legacy through legislation that strengthens our institutions, through oversight that safeguards our finances, and through engagement that includes our citizens. It is a call to reinforce the transparency that builds trust, the accountability that ensures integrity, and the public understanding that sustains legitimacy.
142. We are called to be more than legislators. We are called to be guardians of the Constitution, stewards of the public trust, and servants of the people. We are called to rise above partisanship when the national interest demands it, to disagree with respect when ideology divides us, and to unite with resolve when our nation needs us. We are called to remember that the power we exercise is borrowed, that the authority we wield is entrusted, and that the privilege we enjoy is temporary.

143. In the words of a Setswana saying, "*Motho ke motho ka batho.*" - a person is a person because of other people. This is the essence of our democratic philosophy. The Speaker of Parliament is not above the Members; the Speaker is the servant of the House. The House is not above the people; the House is the servant of the people. And the people, in their collective wisdom, are the sovereign of this Republic.
144. Nelson Mandela once observed that a thing always seems impossible until it is done. Sir Seretse Khama, opening this Parliament in 1978, made much the same point in a different register, when he reminded this House that democracy survives only if it is nursed and nurtured. Between those two observations sits the whole of our task in this Meeting — not to declare reform, but to do the nursing, session after session, Bill after Bill, until what we have promised today is simply how this Parliament works.
145. Honourable Members, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, our task is clear. We must reform Parliament not for its own sake but to democratize Botswana fully. Reform is the bridge between our proud past and the future we owe generations to come. It is the means by which Parliament becomes independent, inclusive, and citizen-centered.
146. Let us therefore commit to a Parliament that listens before it legislates, that consults before it decides, and that empowers

before it governs. Let us build an institution that reflects the diversity of our people, safeguards their rights, and amplifies their voices.

147. This is not the work of one Speaker, one party, or one Parliament. It is the collective responsibility of all who believe in democracy. Together, let us reform boldly, democratize faithfully, and ensure that Botswana's Parliament stands as a beacon of integrity, participation, and national unity. As we honour those who built our democracy, let us reform boldly to ensure their legacy endures.
148. Honourable Members, as we gather in this esteemed chamber, let us commit to being the Parliament that champions inclusivity, equity, and the fullest representation of our diverse society. Inclusivity is the measure of democracy; partnerships are the means to strengthen it.
149. As we embark on this Third Meeting, let us do so with humility, with determination, and with a deep sense of purpose. Let us pass laws that protect the vulnerable, empower the marginalised, and uplift the nation. Let us scrutinise the Executive with fairness, with rigour, and with the understanding that accountability is not hostility but partnership in good governance. Let us open our doors to the public, not as a formality but as a fundamental principle, for Parliament belongs to the people, and the people have a right to know what is done in their name.

150. Honourable Members, let us go forward, guided by the wisdom of our ancestors, inspired by the achievements of our past, and committed to the promise of our future. Let us consolidate and reinforce Botswana's democratic legacy, not for ourselves, but for the generations yet unborn. Let us demonstrate to Africa and the world that democracy is not a foreign import but an African heritage, a Botswana value, and a living tradition.

151. I wish to end with the phoenix poem, Hope

Hope

you are not here just to carry the weight.

You are here

to see what becomes of you after the storm.

There are versions of you waiting ahead,

someone softer, someone wiser,

someone who will one day say

it was hard.

But I am glad I kept going.

Hope

152. Honourable Members, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is therefore with profound honour and in faithful discharge of the authority entrusted to me by this hounorable House that I hereby declare the Third Meeting of the Second Session of the 13th Parliament of the Republic of Botswana, officially open.

153. May God bless the National Assembly of Botswana and this Republic.

I thank you, ka **PULA!**