PARLIAMENT OF BOTSWANA

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS ON WOMEN

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2024

THEME: *"INVEST IN WOMEN: ACCELERATE PROGRESS*"

1. **Mr. Speaker,** I am delighted to be delivering this year`s statement on this important day which is celebrated the world over.

2. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today to celebrate International Women's Day under the theme ***"Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress",***

3. **Mr. Speaker**, International Women's Day is observed annually on March 8th. This special day recognizes the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women, while also highlighting the ongoing fight for gender equality. It offers an opportunity to reflect on progress made, to call for change, and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities. Despite significant progress, gender inequality remains a pressing issue across the globe as women still face significant challenges in areas like equal pay, access to education and healthcare, and representation in leadership positions. You may not know, but as some point, women in this country were paid lower salaries/wages than their male counterparts and in many countries, this is still the case.

4. This year`s theme, in a larger context, embraces deeply the **SDG No. 5** and **Vision 2036 Pillar No. 2** of **Human and Social development**, which profoundly talks in favor of Gender equality and Investment in Women. It is our utmost desire that Botswana must be an inclusive society that fosters

active participation and provides opportunities for all. Therefore, as we celebrate International Women's Day, let us rejuvenate our efforts for a better world - realizing equal rights for women and men, girls and boys everywhere.

5. **Mr. Speaker,** investing in women is not just a financial commitment. It is also an investment that will ensure and safeguard the future prosperity of Botswana because when women have access to finances, credit, technologies and markets, they are likely to expand their businesses and contribute effectively to sustained economic growth and development. Also, investing in their health will also ensure a healthy society which will then lead to a productive society. It must be known that world economies are supported by SMMEs, and approximately, **thirty percent** (30%) of all these SMMEs across the globe are women-owned. In Botswana, **seventy five percent** (75%) of SMMEs are women-owned.

6. That being said, Botswana's efforts have been supported through the establishment of different policies and Acts such as the **Economic Inclusion Act**, to cater for the inclusion of Women in the overall development of this beautiful country of ours. The Women Economic Empowerment Programme and the Women`s Grant under the Department of Gender Affairs are two such examples albeit with implementation challenges. These agendas provide seed money for women's groups to help jumpstart women-led small business projects. This **Mr.**

Speaker, is what this year`s theme is all about. During the delivery of this year`s budget speech, Government has introduced 'Chema Chema' Revolving Fund for the informal sector, with an initial substantial amount of P500m. The Fund is aimed at fundamentally transforming the informal sector and creating employment. This will go a long way in ensuring that women are economically and socially empowered which we hope will increase women political participation. This programme comes at a time when The **Botswana Revised Land Policy of 2019** gives everyone eligibility to a residential plot in a place of their choice, on both state and tribal land. Previously, only unmarried women or the wives of men who did not already own land were eligible for land rights. Now that any woman, married or not, has access to land, they will be able to access programs such as **Chema Chema** and invest in their livelihoods. This is in accordance with **Sustainable Development Goal No. 5** which speaks to **Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls**. At this juncture **Mr. Speaker**, let me appeal to our Government to look closely at female headed households with many children to be assisted with land and child support grants.

7. **Mr. Speaker**, Botswana has indeed made significant strides in issues relating to gender equality and women's empowerment since her independence in 1966. With a patriarchal history in which women have not been socially or economically empowered, we must stand proud and state for the record the achievements we have made as a people in

ensuring women inclusion in policy development, budget allocations and programme mainstreaming.

8. The presence of women in the Business Sector and in leadership positions is of paramount importance to the Government`s commitment in accelerating progress on women empowerment. The current Government led by His Excellency, Dr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi has made an intentional effort in ensuring that Women are visible in leadership position. This government is unmatched in this endeavor.

9. As an example, **Mr. Speaker**, The Permanent Secretary to the President and her deputy, Director of Public Service Management, Clerk of the National Assembly, Director General of the DCEC, BURS and Commissioner of Botswana Police Service, just to mention a few are some of the notable women in leadership positions excelling at what they do and we must congratulate them for a sterling job they continue to do in the development agenda of this country. Thank you His Excellency Dr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi for this sterling job.

10. There are still areas of concern, **Mr. Speaker**, which threatens progress of our pursuit in women empowerment. Issues of gender based violence are still rampant in our society. However, Government of Botswana sees Gender-based Violence as a priority and continues to engage various sectors including Civil Society for targeted response.

Botswana Police Services introduced several initiatives such as Gender and Child Friendly Units in its police stations across the country, the GBV Toll Free Line and Standard Operating Procedures for handling GBV cases. In addition, the Administration of Justice also established Special Courts to speed up hearing of GBV cases. All these efforts are aimed at ensuring that our girls and mothers are empowered and protected. Over and above these efforts, I unreservedly than Her Excellency Mme Mma Atsile for her steadfast support on issues of GBV.

11. **Mr. Speaker,** The Parliamentary Caucus on Women in carrying out its mandate continues to advise Government on the measures to be undertaken to improve the position and status of women within the purview of laws, rules, regulations, policies and programmes and to promote the adequate representation of women in all elective bodies, and decision-making positions.

12. The Parliamentary Caucus on Women interacted with several key Development Partners and Civil Society Organisations. In its interactions, the Committee sought to establish the progress made in achieving gender equality, increasing women in political participation and protecting children's rights. Furthermore, we hold key activities annually which include celebration of International Women's Day, commemoration of 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. The Committee also organized national prayers in Gaborone in April 2023 and in Selibe-Phikwe in May 2023. The

national prayers focused on issues such as Gender Based Violence, Social Ills, Immorality, Drug Use in the Country, Peace and Unity. This country is one of the peaceful countries in the world but surprisingly, we are topping on issues of GBV. This phenomenon Mr. Speaker needs to be investigated to establish the root cause.

13. **Mr. Speaker** in July, 2023, the Parliamentary Caucus on Women hosted the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Steering Committee-Africa Region, on a Sensitisation Campaign on the forthcoming general elections in Botswana. During their visit, the CWP Steering Committee collaborated with the Parliamentary Caucus on Women on advocacy and lobbying for increased women representation. Among key discussions were challenges and opportunities for women in politics. In their recommendations they indicated that there is urgent need for increased participation of women in politics in Botswana. Reforms such as political party funding, use of a quota system in political parties and constitutional review should be considered for the acceleration of increased women in politics, especially in Parliament. They stated that Botswana fairing at **eleven point eleven percent** (11.11%) is disturbingly low, and therefore calls for a transformative action on the country to address the low participation of women in politics.

14. Women represent only **twenty four point nine percent** (24.9%) of Members of Parliament worldwide, which not only makes change more difficult but implies that laws, budgets, and policies are not as effective and can produce

discriminatory outcomes. Gender inequality in politics correlate with broader gender inequalities in society. Therefore, improving women's representation and leadership in parliaments is closely intertwined with supporting parliaments' role through their legislative, budgetary, oversight and representation functions to make societies more inclusive and equal and to enhance our democracy.

15. **Mr. Speaker,** Parliaments play a crucial role in advancing gender equality and advocacy on women empowerment. The Parliamentary Caucus on Women Committee, is and will continue to ensure that the policies as well as laws passed in Parliament are of relevance to the advancement of Women's' fundamental issues. We are seeing a shift **Mr. Speaker,** with the Minister of Finance being a woman.

16. In conclusion **Mr. Speaker**, investing in women is a human right, and a vital basis for building inclusive societies and promoting democracy. We must remember that, every action, big or small, contributes to a more equitable future for all. I call on all of us, individually and collectively;

1. To support women and girls particularly those who want to pursue politics as their career;
2. To use International Women's Day 2024 as an opportunity to invest in women, celebrate their achievements, and accelerate progress towards a more just and equal world.

3. I thank you **Mr. Speaker.**