PARLIAMENT OF BOTSWANA

DRAFT STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS ON WOMEN

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025

THEME: *"Accelerate Action"*

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

2. Honourable Members this year International Women's Day is celebrated under the theme ***"'Accelerate Action".***

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.

4. This year`s theme, in a larger context, embraces deeply the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 5** and **Vision 2036 Pillar No. 2** of **Human and Social development,(*TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY & EMPOWER ALL WOMEN & GIRLS*)** which profoundly talks in favor of Gender equality and Investment in Women. To *Accelerate Action* for women's equality requires a multi-

pronged approach that addresses systemic barriers, social norms, and power dynamics.

5. **Mr. Speaker,** there is need to enforce legal and policy reforms. Strengthening and enforcing laws that promote gender equality, such as equal pay, reproductive Health rights, Land ownership rights, and protection against gender-based violence. Further, promotion of economic empowerment, increase women's leadership and representation, elimination of gender bias in education through providing equal access to quality education for girls and women, combat gender-based violence and discrimination, enable digital access, are one of the key areas that can help advance gender equality more quickly.

6. As you are aware Mr. Speaker, historically, women's representation in the political sphere of central and local government respectively has been a thorny issue for our country. Botswana signed and ratified the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development in the year 1997 making a commitment to achieve at least a 30% quota for women in political and decision making structures. We continue to face significant challenges in regards to women's representation in Parliament, Cabinet, and Local Authority councils, as evidenced by a gradual decline from 1995 to date. In the immediate past Parliament, Women representation stood at 11 percent, while in the current 13th Parliament, it had declined to a mere 8.9 percent. This singular decline, is a call for a robust approach in tackling all barriers to women participation in decision making positions especially in politics.

7. In 2017 Botswana signed the Post 2015 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Though we applaud the Government of Botswana for signing the SADC Gender Protocol, we still have a long way to go to reach the 30% recommended by the protocol. As mentioned, Botswana is the poorest performer in SADC in terms of women in political decision making with 9% women in parliament.

8. Mr. Speaker, we need to take accelerated action now. Achieving the goal of gender equality in all spheres requires close collaboration between government and civil society. I urge Members of parliament to drive this agenda through:

- Electoral reforms: Advocacy for electoral reform to change the electoral system to a more inclusive one
- Quota: The Electoral Act should be amended to require political parties to field 50% women candidates at both the national and local government levels
- Address SRHR and GBV issues through adopting and implementing frameworks, policies, programmes and services such as the SADC-PF Model Law on Gender Based Violence.

9. **Mr. Speaker,** Mr. Speaker, despite efforts to combat Gender-Based Violence, women continue to be subjected to it. The government has introduced laws and policies that are meant to combat gender-based violence, including courts dedicated to dealing with such cases and there still are plans to establish a sex offender registry. Despite all these efforts, Botswana Police Service recorded at least 93 cases of rape against women between 19th December 2024 and 5th January 2025.

During the same period, 19 murders were recorded and most of these victims are women. From the news reports it is evident that these figures have risen significantly to date. These figures represent a grim reminder of the pervasive violence that women and girls in our society continue to face. We are not doing enough and therefore cannot be complacent. These numbers are a call for alarm in our communities and the nation at large to taka accelerated action in condemning GBV in all its forms.

10. I must however, state Mr. Speaker that 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.

11. Moreover, the Government of Botswana has taken steps towards ensuring gender equality including changing laws deemed to be oppressing women and enacting new ones, such as the Domestic Violence Act. In 2015 Botswana adopted the National Policy on Gender and Development and also appointed a Gender Commission. All these efforts are aimed at ensuring that our girls and mothers are empowered and protected

12. 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 Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (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.

13. 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.

15. **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.

16. **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.

17. **Mr. Speaker**, to further accelerate women empowerment, Parliament can also invest in programs that encourage girls to pursue studies in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) from an early age, make public awareness campaigns by launching campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and promote the image of women as leaders and innovators. **Mr. Speaker,** infrastructure development in our country must consider the unique needs of women and girls to ensure safety, accessibility, and inclusivity

18. 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 2025 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.**