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**High-level roundtable on "Progress made in the implementation of and
follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) outcomes
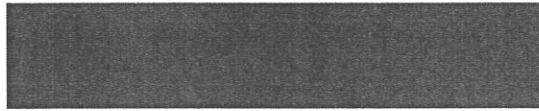at the regional and international levels"**

Statement submitted by

H.E. Mr. Moshe Kao
Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of Lesotho in Geneva

Monday, 8 May 2017

INTERVENTION BY H.E MR. MOSHE KAO AT THE HIGH-LEVEL

ROUNDTABLE ON "REVIEW OF PROGRESS MADE IN THE

IMPLEMENTATION OF WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS) OUTCOMES"

8 MAY, 2017, GENEVA

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Mr. Moderator,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to participate in this High Level Round Table and I wish to register Lesotho's appreciation to UNCTAD for their kind gesture in inviting Lesotho to this High Level Round Table on Review of the Progress Made in the Implementation of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) outcomes.

Mr Moderator

My Minister of Communications, Science and Technology Hon Seriealong Qoo, was unable to participate at this high-level round table due to pressing matters in the capital with less than a month to elections. I therefore deliver this statement on his behalf.

At the outset I wish to reaffirm Lesotho's commitment to the WSIS process and reiterate that Lesotho fully recognizes that ICTs are very crucial for achieving the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. We are cognizant that ICTs are already enabling billions of people globally to have access to education, healthcare, and services such as mobile banking, e-government and social media, among others. The rapid spread of these digital tools in various sectors is transforming the economies of most developing countries.

As we set our eyes to 2020, therefore, we should leave no stone unturned if we are to achieve the SDG Number 9 target of significantly increasing access to information and communications technology and striving to provide universal and affordable access to the internet in Least Developed Countries by 2020. This is in line with the Istanbul Programme of Actions too. Global digital solidarity should, *have* be an overarching goal for the international community and all forms of cooperation including the innovative financial resources mobilization, transfer of sound technology, and capacity-building should be explored. More importantly, collaboration of all stakeholders, governments, business communities and civil society organizations throughout the world will be instrumental.

Mr. Moderator,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

For Lesotho, in order to appreciate the progress which the country has made in the implementation of the WSIS, *outcomes* it is vital to understand Lesotho's context. Lesotho is a very unique country. It is the only country in the world to be entirely above 1000 meters in elevation, though; paradoxically, it also has the highest lowest point in the entire world at 1400 meters. While the country's unique geography has earned it the title of "the Kingdom in the sky", the mountainous topography, small population and small economic base present serious hurdles in the country's efforts to improve connectivity.

In this regard to address the issue of connectivity, simultaneous investments have to be made in access roads, grid electricity, to name but a few. Despite these

challenges, Lesotho has however experienced a decade of high growth in the communications sector, driven by mobile phone technology. For the first time, the total number of connections for both fixed and mobile services has surpassed the population of Lesotho translating into a teledensity figure of 124%. This has been achieved as a result of the progressive policies and appropriate regulatory intervention implemented by the country. In the same vein, the geographic area coverage which has access to communications service has also increased reaching just over 90% of the country according to the 2015 estimates.

In all these endeavours we cannot sufficiently emphasise the primacy of the Universal Service Fund (USF) in making inroads in providing communications services to communities beyond urban and "economically viable" areas. The Fund implemented projects whose aim was to extend mobile network coverage to unserved areas and broadband internet access to schools.

However, it is also worth noting that internet subscription for fixed services remains low, at 1% of the total internet subscribers while mobile internet subscribers accounts for 99% of the total subscribers. Nonetheless the internet usage remains low at 38% on mobile handsets stands. There could be a plethora of reasons for the low usage but the glaring ones are low ICT skills, limited broadband infrastructure and high internet costs.

On e-Government, as the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) declaration and Action Plan called upon governments to implement e-Government systems to facilitate administrative activities and delivery of services to their citizens, the Government has established Data Centre facility for the centralized

and shared services amongst the line Ministries. The Data Centre facility hosts amongst others the International Financial Module (IFMIS), Electronic Medical Record (EMR), Human Resource Management Module (HRMS), and Livestock Registry Module etc. The Government has also secured a Loan/Grant from the African Development Bank for the implementation of the Lesotho e-Government Infrastructure with the specific purpose of strengthening existing Government Data Centres and portals as well as improving provision of e- services for state building such as automated administrative services including e-payroll, civil registration, e-health, e-procurement, e-customs and revenue management.

With the generous support of ITU, Lesotho implemented a Connect a School/Community Project which entailed installing computer laboratories in the ten districts of Lesotho. In the identified schools which are already using the facilities the laboratories have improved the education approach at these schools and the pupils' performance has since improved comparatively.

Lesotho also received funding from the Government of India on the Pan African e-Network (PAeN) Infrastructure Project that facilitates the infrastructure sharing amongst the 53 African Countries. The project has been running from 2009 until to date. The project has a component of Tele-Education which offers the educational advancement in Diploma, Degree, Masters Certificates. The initiative has contributed positively to the educational trend in Lesotho by a margin of 15%. The enrollment to these programmes by locals has been enormous in the past years and this will definitely add value as the increased number of Basotho citizens continue to be exposed to ICT, and one may safely assume that there is a likelihood of more Basotho that will be able to create job opportunities by way of deploying ICT initiatives.

Mr. Moderator,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

The above notwithstanding, we remain concerned at the continuing digital divides in ICT accessibility, affordability and availability as elucidated in the Secretary General's report. More than half the world's population, including the vast majority of individuals in the Least Developed Countries, do not have Internet access. Thus, if the noble quest for a development-oriented information society is to be achieved, a revitalized global partnership for bridging this divide should be prioritized.

It is also important to engage leading elements from the private sector, Universities, pertinent institutes and tertiary institutions to implement strategies for technology catch-up that focus on building the indigenous knowledge base, particularly through the transfer, adaptation and diffusion of technology. For Lesotho, as is the case in many other LDCs, successful technology acquisition and adaptation could spell the difference between rapid and inclusive economic growth and stagnation and thus marginalization.

Lesotho has the firm believe that the Agenda 2063 of the African Union towards Structural Transformation requires an enabling environment for ICTs. Lesotho as stated earlier has a small population, as such enhanced ICT skills and improved infrastructure are paramount for sustained economic growth and development.

In closing, Mr. Moderator, I would like to categorically reiterate the opinion of the Government of Lesotho in the potential of ICTs in our countries development including in turning it from a Land-locked country to Land linked country.

I thank you for your kind attention.