



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

**ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY DR. MOKGWEETSI E. K. MASISI  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA**

**ON THE**

**UPDATE OF THE ON-GOING GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE  
TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

**29<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

1. **Dumelang Batswana** let me begin by letting you know that I am fine as I complete my 11<sup>th</sup> day in quarantine. Please join me as I express my deepest sympathies to Mr. Thuso Thuzoskie Letlhoma's family following his passing after a long illness. May his soul and those of others who passed in this period rest in eternal peace. Amen.
2. **Bagaetsho**, winter is now upon us and I call on all of you to take precautionary measures against the cold weather conditions. This is particularly important, as we enter the winter season against the backdrop of a global pandemic, commonly known as COVID-19, that has affected millions of people and killed hundreds of thousands around the world.
3. In this regard, I would like to preface my address by thanking all Batswana for their understanding and cooperation with Government during this trying period. I am very grateful that since the outbreak of COVID-19, Batswana have mounted a spirited response, first to prevent the spread and transmission of the disease in the country and secondly, to contain the rate of infections.

4. This strategy I must say, has to a large extent paid off as evidenced by the low number of local transmissions so far. However, it is too early for us to celebrate any success because as you will agree with me, we still have a long way to go in our fight against this invisible enemy that knows no geographical boundaries.
  
5. As you all know, we have endured forty nine (49) days of extreme social distancing measures, with immense personal and financial sacrifices. Nothing has been easy for all of us but it is through your unity and unwavering commitment to fight this scourge that has made this mammoth task a success so far. I am encouraged to note that everything that has been achieved is as a result of our collective efforts, and for that, YES, I thank, all of you.
  
6. We are still going through the phased approach to ease the lockdown restrictions and this is intended to facilitate economic recovery and social transition into the new normal, underpinned by disease containment and management. In this regard, I urge all of you, particularly the private sector, to try

your best to recoup our losses during the forty nine days of extreme social distancing measures.

7. I also want to assure the private sector that Government will continue to support you through strategic interventions as we move towards full economic recovery. There are many lessons that we have and will continue to take away as a nation during this crisis and one of them is the need to fast-track local production of essential goods and services. In this respect, Government will move with speed to implement the amended Trade and Industrial Development Acts which will contribute in no small measure, to the economic empowerment of citizens. Similarly, Government will prioritise the enactment of the Citizen Economic Empowerment and the Economic Diversification Drive laws.
  
8. **Bagaetsho**, according to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the COVID-19 pandemic caused a 22% fall in international tourist arrivals in the first three months of 2020 leading to a decline of 60%-80% in revenues. In Botswana, Community Trusts and other tourism operations have had all their bookings for the current year cancelled leaving them with no source of income. Lack of hunting due to movement

restrictions will continue to significantly affect revenue for our communities and other mobile safari services including freelance guides.

9. In order to revive Botswana's tourism sector Government shall accelerate the initiatives aimed at stimulating local and regional tourism by creating an enabling environment for increased investment in the tourism sector and facilitate in particular citizen participation. The Agro Tourism guidelines are also being reviewed to facilitate citizens to make a decent living out of their fields (Masimo). To compliment Agro Tourism and diversify its products, Game Farming guidelines shall soon be issued to enable those Botswana who are interested to keep small wildlife or game in their fields as they meet set criteria.
  
10. Furthermore, land reserved for Tourism purposes has been identified around the country and shall be made available to citizens for investment. This type of land has been identified in various districts such as, Kgatleng, Ngamiland, Chobe, Central and the South East.

11. I have also noted with keen interest the production of some COVID-19 equipment by both locally-based institutions and individuals to meet the needs of our people. For example, I am happy to note that individuals in this country are producing face masks which will help in containing the spread of the virus. The University of Botswana is also manufacturing face shields, sanitizers and is currently working on a prototype for possible ventilator production. The Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST) has also developed a drone that can be used to disinfect places contaminated by the virus. Furthermore, our research institutions are engaged in research to find a cure for the Coronavirus basing on indigenous knowledge systems and plants. These are indeed commendable initiatives by our own people.

12. I want to emphasise that in spite of the challenges that our economy has been facing, I have been encouraged by the uptake of online technologies by Batswana in adapting to the restrictions brought about by COVID-19. Many of us have also learnt to use technology for our virtual meetings. Similarly, during the lockdown our education system continued to provide educational material online, on television and on radio

to ensure that there is continuity in the learning and development of our children.

13. This undoubtedly, speaks to the potential and the capability of our people to embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution which is where we must continue to gravitate, not only to diversify our economy but also as an effective measure of recovery from the impact of this pandemic and beyond. With the expected openings of more businesses from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020, these measures are meant to facilitate that the economy continues to grow and flourish during this difficult period. We must, however, at any point not allow for a further marginalisation of any segment of our population. Therefore, we must work extra hard to embrace and include all in our transformation.

14. **Bagaetsho**, I need to emphasise that the success of the phases to ease lockdown has been the result of hard work of health authorities and many other stakeholders, as well as self-management and discipline by Batswana. This is indeed commendable and it is one of the esteemed qualities that has defined us as a nation since independence. We therefore need to sustain these principles to ensure a win in the fight against COVID-19.

15. Nevertheless, the phased approach to relaxing the lockdown restrictions has been largely successful, it has not been without challenges, particularly with regard to the cross border movement of essential goods and services. Consequently this has had negative social and economic implications and tested our preparedness and resilience as a nation. It has also tested our commitment to the new normal in how adaptable and agile we are in embracing new challenges that are wide and far reaching. Therefore, the sporadic disruption and delays in the food supply chain presents us with an enduring challenge which we must address as a nation. In the same vein we need to be very vigilant in observing COVID-19 protocols in places which are susceptible to crowding such as malls, service centres and accident scenes. These must stop completely.

16. **The** tiered approach to combating COVID-19 has been first and foremost about our health and survival as nation. To this end, our top priority was to make sure that no Motswana would go hungry during this time. So far more than 97% of those assessed for illegibility of food distribution have been assisted. At the same time, Government is working hard to address the problem of wastage through double dipping by beneficiaries, to ensure each deserving case receives their fair share of the

food rations. Government is keenly following allegations of corruption and the full might of the state will not spare anyone, anywhere from investigations and justice for no one is owed anything more than what is owed the average law abiding citizen.

17. As I have mentioned before, this period has presented us with an opportunity to be innovative and develop sustainable measures of food production. Therefore, Government, the private sector and non-governmental organisations with your full participation, will have to work even harder to produce our own food and other basic needs.

18. Despite our limited successes, we must continue to focus our energies on fighting this pandemic because the situation is still fluid and unpredictable. As you are all aware, there is currently no cure for COVID-19. Therefore, we must jealously guard against local transmissions. While everyone is at the risk of contracting coronavirus, we must continue to be vigilant as older people and those with pre-existing medical conditions face the greatest danger.

19. **Betsho**, as schools prepare to open next week, the education system is ready to adapt to the new normal. To this end, class sizes have been reduced by half and schools are to operate on a shift basis to provide for social distancing. Furthermore, our teachers and learners will wear face masks, whilst teaching and health and safety measures will be high on their daily agenda. Our teachers are the front line staff in schools to ensure that social distancing and all other measures to contain the spread and transmission of the virus in schools are in place and are effective. My Government will do all it can for teachers as it is doing for health frontline workers, as they are the frontline workers in the education sector and primary protectors of our children. We will endeavour to protect our children's protectors and our own protectors.

20. I also wish to remind you and emphasise that we have to continue to be vigilant against the spread and transmission of the virus since the worst is not over yet.

21. **Batswana betsho**, as the nation may be aware, Batswana who are based outside the country, particularly those on study programs, as well as, those who were on short term visits were

caught up in the global travel restrictions that followed the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In this regard, my Government has been exploring various ways to assist these citizens to either return home or cope with the negative impacts of the pandemic wherever they are based.

22. Let me highlight that the majority of our citizens based in the Republic of South Africa who requested to be facilitated back home continue to be assisted with the cooperation of the South African Government. So far, more than four hundred (400) of our nationals who were resident in South Africa and neighbouring countries have successfully been facilitated to return home.

23. Furthermore, in order to alleviate the plight of Batswana abroad, my Government has recently taken a decision to assist those who have been adversely affected by the pandemic with financial assistance. This I must stress is a temporary measure to supplement the costs of their upkeep for the months of May and June, 2020. The categories that will be assisted include government sponsored students, students on scholarships provided by foreign governments and other institutions, and privately sponsored students. Other Batswana who were on

short term visits abroad and got caught up in the lockdowns have been assessed and will be assisted accordingly as well. The process to administer this financial assistance through our diplomatic missions is at an advanced stage. I must emphasise though that such assistance is as I said, temporary and comes at great cost we will have to forego other things we had planned for, to achieve this.

24. **Batswana betsho,** I need to underscore that it is not every Motswana based outside the country who will benefit from this limited financial assistance package. The priority is only for those identified as deserving cases.

25. Another decision that was made in the past week was to engage the services of Ethiopian Airlines to assist in transporting Batswana from Addis Ababa to Gaborone. This arrangement is only available to Batswana based abroad who are in a position to pay for their own connecting flights from Addis Ababa to Gaborone. Our expectation is that the chartered Ethiopian Airlines flight will arrive in Gaborone on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020 with more than one hundred (100) of our citizens on board. Furthermore Namib Air has also been engaged to

assist in the transportation of Batswana from London and Frankfurt.

26. My Government continues to do its best to safeguard the health of this nation whilst ensuring that our economy is able to survive following the deleterious effects of the pandemic. It must be appreciated therefore, that our on-going efforts to safeguard the future of Botswana in the face of this pandemic will be costly and require that hard choices be made to prioritize the limited resources at our disposal. That is why even though we value all our citizens in the diaspora, the priority for any interventions will be limited to only those in dire circumstances and are unable to sustain themselves during this difficult time. As part of opening up our economy Government has decided though in a controlled manner, for the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, the details of which will be communicated by the Honourable Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry Ms. Peggy Serame shortly. Please, please, please be sensitive, sensible and responsible. Government will not hesitate to respond if we see signs and evidence of none compliance and threat of transmission.

27. **Bagaetsho**, in conclusion, I request and urge all worshipers in this country to continue praying for the survival of the nation during these challenging times, as you go to places of worship on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> June and Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020 or any other day in accordance with COVID-19 health protocols.

28. I want to emphasise that while my Government is implementing plans to recover our economy, we must continue to maintain strict health protocols such as frequent washing of hands with clean water and soap or using sanitizers, wearing of masks in public and continue to keep a safe distance from one another.

29. I thank you for your attention.

**P U L A ! !**

