

Republic of Botswana (9/7/05)

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D STATEMENTS:

D1) H.E. the President's Declaration of Drought Relief (7/7/05)

1. As you all are aware the levels of rainfall during the last, 2004-05, season has been below normal throughout most of our country. What rain there has been has, for the most part, also been poorly distributed in terms of planting cycles. This has resulted in low hectarage ploughed and widespread crop failure.

2. Countrywide, the total area planted was, in fact, only about 72 500 hectares, which represents less than a quarter of our cultivable land. This year's total cereal production is now estimated at about 19,000 metric tonnes, about 10% of the national requirement and less than half of the 46,000 metric tonnes produced during 2003/04.

3. While livestock conditions are generally fair in most, though certainly not all, parts of our country, deterioration can be expected in the coming months.

4. Bagaetsho, it is encouraging to note that the nutritional status of our under-five children has been steadily improving, as evident from statistics reporting a 25% decline in malnutrition between 2002 and 2004. But, unless remedial action is taken, the envisaged crop failure could lead to a reversal of these gains at a time when we seek to ensure the nutritional security of all Batswana.

5. For the time being we can take some comfort in the fact that the water supply in major villages and rural areas is generally stable. But, there is a risk of shortage in some villages due to the high demand on their well fields, while the south east is, of course, affected by the Gaborone Dam's current low water level.

6. We are further concerned about the water quality in about 20% of our villages with water supply systems. Although augmentation measures have been instituted, sixty-three villages are currently being provided with bowsed water, the situation will need to be closely monitored so as to ensure a timely response to any adverse developments.

7. Bagaetsho, it is the fundamental responsibility of this Government to promote the welfare of all Batswana. As such we remain mindful of the effect of rainfall on your wellbeing, more especially for those of you seeking to make ends meet in our rural areas. In light of the conditions I have just outlined, I am, left with no choice but to declare all of Botswana drought stricken.

8. I have further directed that drought relief measures be implemented with effect from the 1st of this month to the 30th June 2006, which shall include:

i) The mobilization of a Labour Intensive Public Works Programme, aimed at creating employment countrywide, to provide income support to needy families.

ii) The provision of Supplementary Feeding for all children under five years

of age attending Child Welfare Clinics.

iii) The further provision of Supplementary Feeding of children below 7 years who are not at school and are not covered under any other ongoing feeding programmes.

iv) The provision of a second meal for the Remote Area Dwellers' children who attend school.

v) That steps also be taken to further ensure that the most vulnerable who are neither resident in major villages nor remote area settlements should also benefit from the relief programme.

vi) That free seed be distributed to a maximum of 5 hectares per farmer in the communal sub-sector; and

vii) That there be a 25% price subsidy on selected cattle feeds, namely; dicalcium phosphate, winterlick, beef finisher, drought pellets and coarse salt.

9. Bagaetsho, with respect to the Labour Intensive Public Works Projects that are to be undertaken, I have further directed that they should focus on:

i) The construction of classrooms, tribal administration offices, as well as, teachers' and nurses' quarters;

ii) The strengthening of pickets along our international borders in order to ensure the speedy repair and maintenance of the animal disease cordon fences;

iii) The re-enforcing of the safety and security of public property by employing Security guards to look after Council Properties, more especially borehole equipment;

iv) The maintenance of fire breaks and formation of standby fire fighting teams from among people involved in the Labour Intensive Public Works;

v) The employment of additional temporary Special Police Constables to be deployed in the Districts; and

vi) The desilting of small dams.

10. In addition, I have instructed Government Ministries and Departments to continue to review their ongoing projects and programmes so as to determine how they can also contribute to the implementation of the Labour Intensive Public Works Project.

11. Batswana Betsho, the steps that I have just announced once more serve to underscore your Government's commitment to improving the lives of all citizens on a sustainable basis.

12. Our National Strategy for Poverty Reduction further recognizes that well targeted social safety nets need to be instituted to provide social welfare support to vulnerable groups. The Strategy also ties livelihoods to rehabilitation and social investment to ensure that individuals take advantage of opportunities.

13. It is therefore incumbent upon every Motswana, particularly those who benefit from relief measures, to recognise that such interventions, although temporary, are quite costly.

14. The expense of these programmes means that those receiving assistance should maximize the resulting benefits not only for themselves and their families, but also for the overall welfare of their communities.

15. In conclusion, I wish to implore all Batswana to work hard to diversify into more sustainable and less drought-prone livelihoods. Similarly, I call upon those charged with the responsibility of implementing drought relief projects to be diligent in executing their mandate.

16. Last but not least, given the uncertain human water supply situation in the country we must all redouble our efforts to conserve water. Nelwang ke Pula Bagaetsho!