

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 ON BEHALF OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT AND ON MY OWN BEHALF, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WISH THE NATION AND OUR VISITORS A HEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR; MAY 2008 BE AN EVENTFUL YEAR FOR ALL OF US.

1.2 AS 2007 DRAWS TO AN END, I WOULD LIKE TO REFLECT ON THE ACHIEVEMENTS FOR THE PAST YEAR AND ALSO BRIEFLY HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THAT LIE AHEAD OF US AS A COUNTRY.

1.3 FROM A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, THE YEAR 2007 HAS BEEN A YEAR OF SOME MOMENTOUS ACHIEVEMENTS; WE HAD A SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL SUMMIT, GREAT STRIDES HAVE BEEN MADE ON THE GOOD GOVERNANCE FRONT. TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES IN THE HEALTH SECTOR, THE HEALTH POLICY HAS BEEN LAUNCHED. WE HAVE FORGED AHEAD WITH THE FIGHT AGAINST THE HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC AND THE ABUSE OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN. PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION REMAINS A PRIORITY.

**1.4** ON THE OTHER HAND, WE CANNOT OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT 2007 CAME WITH GREAT CHALLENGES BOTH FOR HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT AND THE COUNTRY IN GENERAL. SOME OF THE CHALLENGES INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING; DROUGHT, WILD FIRES, ISSUES OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN, DRUG SHORTAGES, SLOW GROWTH OF OUR ECONOMY AND POVERTY TO MENTION BUT A FEW.

**1.5** AS WE ENTER 2008 I AM AWARE THAT WE HAVE A HUGE TASK AHEAD OF US, WHICH IS THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT EXPECTED TO BE HELD SOME TIME IN THE NEW YEAR. AS THE ELECTORATE WE ALL NEED TO EXERCISE OUR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO VOTE FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT.

**1.6** IN THE PRECEDING PARAGRAPHS, I HAVE BRIEFLY PRESENTED A SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES FACED BOTH BY GOVERNMENT AND THE NATION AS A WHOLE. I WILL BRIEFLY HIGHLIGHT THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR 2007**

### **2 ECONOMIC OUTLOOK**

- 2.1 ECONOMIC GROWTH REBOUNDED TO 2.8% IN 2006 FROM 2.3% IN 2005 WITH AN AVERAGE OF 2% IN THE PAST 5 YEARS. HOWEVER, THE REAL GDP PER CAPITA STILL REMAINS THE LOWEST AMONG THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CUSTOMS UNION (SACU) COUNTRIES.
- 2.2 AGRICULTURE DID NOT PERFORM AS EXPECTED DUE TO SHORTAGE OF RAINS AND OTHER NATURAL FACTORS AND AS A RESULT IT SHRUNK BY 2.4% WITH A GREAT SHARE OF THE DECLINE ATTRIBUTED TO CROPS ON SWAZI NATION LAND (SNL) AND INDIVIDUAL TENURE FARMS (ITF). THE LIVESTOCK WAS ALSO SUBDUED. THE COUNTRY'S EXPORTS HAS BEEN NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY THE STRENGTH OF THE EXCHANGE RATE BETWEEN THE LILANGENI AND THE US DOLLAR BUT THE STRONG DEMAND FOR SOME MAJOR DOMESTIC COMMODITIES MINIMISED THE IMPACT ON OVERALL EXPORT RECEIPTS.

2.3 THE LABOUR MARKET CONTINUES TO FACE CHALLENGES WITH THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE STANDING AT 29%. THE YOUTH IS THE MOST AFFECTED BY THIS PROBLEM, THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AMONGST THIS GROUP IS AROUND 40%.

### **3. EFFORTS AT EMPLOYMENT CREATION**

3.1 INVESTMENT PROMOTION CONTINUES TO BE A MAJOR FOCUS IN THE COUNTRY. GOVERNMENT IS WORKING WITH THE SWAZILAND INVESTMENT PROMOTION AUTHORITY (SIPA) AND HAS BEEN ENGAGED IN A NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE INVESTMENT.

3.2 INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT REMAINS KEY IN THE CREATION OF EMPLOYMENT. THE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AT NGWENYA INDUSTRIAL ESTATE WHICH MEASURES ABOUT 200 HECTARES IS ALMOST COMPLETE. GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO ACQUIRED LAND FOR THE EXPANSION OF MATSAPHA INDUSTRIAL ESTATE AND IS CURRENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING SITES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRIAL ESTATES IN MANKAYANE AND SIDVOKODVO.

- 3.3 IN TERMS OF POLICY REFORM, GOVERNMENT, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION (UNIDO), IS DEVELOPING AN INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND STRATEGY, THIS WILL WORK WELL TOGETHER WITH THE INDUSTRIAL MASTER PLAN WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN COMPLETED.
- 3.4 GOVERNMENT STRONGLY BELIEVES THAT THE SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE (SME) DEVELOPMENT IS THE BACKBONE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR ANY COUNTRY BECAUSE IT FILTERS QUITE SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE GRASS ROOT LEVEL. THE SME UNIT IS ENGAGED IN NUMEROUS ACTIVITIES, WHICH WILL ENSURE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECTOR.
- 3.5 THE HANDICRAFT SECTOR HAS GREAT POTENTIAL AND GOVERNMENT IS DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO SUPPORT THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THIS SECTOR. TO ENHANCE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THIS SECTOR, GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO EMBARKED ON THE SKILLS OUTREACH PROGRAMME WHICH SEEKS TO PROVIDE SKILLS TO THE YOUTH IN THE RURAL AREAS. THE PROGRAMME CONSISTS OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED IN THE NATIONAL HANDICRAFT TRAINING CENTER (NHTC) WHICH IS ASSISTED BY THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON TAIWAN.

**3.6** MAY I TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CONGRATULATE THE WORKERS AND THE EMPLOYERS FOR THE HARMONIOUS INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CLIMATE IN THE COUNTRY. I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT IF WE CONTINUE TO USE THE EXISTING STRUCTURES AND THE TRIPARTITE FORUM TO RESOLVE OUR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ISSUES, WE WILL IMPROVE OUR OPPORTUNITIES TO ATTRACT INVESTMENT.

**3.7** I ALSO WISH TO THANK AND APPRECIATE THE EFFORTS OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN IMPLEMENTING GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES AND IN ENSURING THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO THE PEOPLE. I NOTE HOWEVER THAT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE AND I WOULD THEREFORE ENCOURAGE ALL CIVIL SERVANTS TO WORK HARDER IN THE COMING YEAR AND FUTURE YEARS.

#### **4. TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

**4.1** TOURISM REMAINS A KEY GROWTH SECTOR. IN ORDER TO PROMOTE TOURISM, A NUMBER OF INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN TAKEN, WHICH INCLUDE, THE DRAFTING OF ENABLING LEGISLATION TO REGULATE THE GAMING INDUSTRY, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGULATIONS ON TOURISM ACCOMMODATION,

AND ESTABLISHMENTS. WE HAVE ALSO HOSTED A NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS AND TOUR OPERATORS TO SHOW CASE OUR TOURISM ATTRACTIONS.

**4.2** TO EXPAND THE SECTOR AND ALSO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE FIFA 2010, SOCCER WORLD CUP, GOVERNMENT IS DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO EXTEND THE OPENING HOURS OF THE BORDERS BETWEEN THE REPUBLICS OF SOUTH AFRICA AND MOZAMBIQUE AND HOPEFULLY THIS WILL BE ON TIME FOR THE FIFA 2010 SOCCER WORLD CUP. THE COMPUTERIZATION OF IMMIGRATION FORMALITIES AT OUR BORDER POSTS WILL ALSO GREATLY ENHANCE THE SPEED WITH WHICH WE ARE ABLE TO ATTEND TO OUR TOURISTS, BUSINESS PEOPLE AND OTHER VISITORS.

**4.3** CABINET HAS ALSO SET UP A CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE TO WORK ON THE ISSUES OF THE FIFA 2010 SOCCER WORLD CUP AND THEY ARE WORKING WITH A TECHNICAL COMMITTEE IN ORDER TO SEE THAT AS A COUNTRY WE BENEFIT FROM THIS GLOBAL EVENT. THE FIFA 2010 SOCCER WORLD CUP TECHNICAL TEAM IS COLLABORATING WITH REPUBLICS OF SOUTH AFRICA AND MOZAMBIQUE ON HOW BEST WE CAN BENEFIT,

AS NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES IN TERMS OF HOSTING TEAMS THAT WILL BE COMING FOR THE WORLD CUP IN SOUTH AFRICA.

## **5. ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS (EPAS)**

5.1 THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND TOGETHER WITH SOME SADC COUNTRIES IS NEGOTIATING ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (EPAS) WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION.

5.2 THE PARTIES HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO NEGOTIATE AND CONCLUDE THE NEGOTIATIONS BEFORE DECEMBER 2007 AND THEY HAVE AGREED TO HAVE AN INTERIM EPA AGREEMENT (IEPAA) IN PLACE.

5.3 SWAZILAND TOGETHER WITH OTHER WILLING AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC (ACP) MEMBER STATES INITIALLED THE IEPAA PENDING CONCLUSION OF A FULL EPA IN 2008. THIS IS A VERY ESSENTIAL UNDERTAKING FOR THE COUNTRY THAT WOULD PREVENT DISRUPTION OF EXPORTS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION FROM 2008 SINCE THE CURRENT COTONOU AGREEMENT THAT GOVERNS PREFERENTIAL MARKET ACCESS WILL NO LONGER BE IN PLACE.

## 6. REVENUE COLLECTION

6.1 OUR COUNTRY CONTINUES TO DERIVE OVER 50 % OF OUR REVENUE FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN CUSTOMS UNION (SACU). WE RECOGNISE THAT SACU IS AN IMPORTANT PARTNER OF GROWTH IN THE ECONOMIES OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION.

6.2 HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT REMAINS COMMITTED TO REFORM THE ADMINISTRATION AND COLLECTION OF DOMESTIC REVENUES. THE SWAZILAND REVENUE AUTHORITY BILL, 2007 HAS BEEN PASSED BY BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE AUGUST HOUSE FOR PASSING THE BILL.

6.3 THE BILL WILL FACILITATE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SWAZILAND REVENUE AUTHORITY, WHICH WILL UNIFY THE TWO REVENUE COLLECTION DEPARTMENTS AND BRING ABOUT SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF REVENUE COLLECTION IN THE COUNTRY.

## **7 IMPROVING FISCAL DISCIPLINE**

7.1 GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO GIVE PRIORITY TO FISCAL DISCIPLINE, BY ENSURING THAT LIMITED RESOURCES ARE ALLOCATED EFFICIENTLY TO KEY SECTORS AND MONITORED.

7.2 AS PART OF ITS EXPENDITURE CONTROL STRATEGY, GOVERNMENT HAS ENGAGED CROWN AGENTS OF LONDON TO ASSIST WITH STREAMLINING THE GOVERNMENT'S PROCUREMENT SYSTEM. WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO A MORE ROBUST AND VIGILANT GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT SYSTEM.

7.3 OTHER MEASURES AIMED AT EXPENDITURE CONTROL, INCLUDE THE INTRODUCTION OF A COMPUTERIZED COMMITMENT/ORDER AND TOUR ADVANCE SYSTEMS. A COMPUTERIZED FUEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IS ALSO BEING PILOT-TESTED IN THE POLICE SERVICE.

7.4 GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE TO PUT IN PLACE POLICIES THAT WILL ENSURE THAT THE NATIONAL BUDGET ADDRESSES SOME OF THE KEY SOCIAL SECTORS SUCH AS HEALTH AND EDUCATION WHILST TAKING COGNIZANCE OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES.

## **8 AGRICULTURE**

- 8.1 THE AGRICULTURAL SUMMIT WHICH WAS BLESSED BY THE PRESENCE OF HIS MAJESTY THE KING AND HER MAJESTY THE INDLOVUKAZI IN JULY THIS YEAR WAS A MAJOR MILESTONE FOR GOVERNMENT.
- 8.2 THE SUMMIT PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CONSOLIDATING THE VIEWS OF AMONGST OTHERS: THE FARMER, INPUT SUPPLIERS, MARKETING BODIES, GOVERNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS. IT ALSO PROVIDED A SOLID CORNERSTONE FOR MOVING THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL AGENDA FORWARD.
- 8.3 GOVERNMENT FULLY RECOGNISES THE VIEWS EXPRESSED THROUGH THE SUMMIT PROCESS AS THOSE OF THE NATION. THE CONSULTATIONS WERE EXTENSVE INVOLVING ALL LEVELS STARTING AT CHIEFDOM LEVEL, TO THE TINKHUNDLA, REGIONAL AND FINALLY NATIONAL LEVEL. MOREOVER, THE CONSULTATIONS INVOLVED ALL FARMER GROUPS WHICH ARE THE SUBSISTENCE, SMALLHOLDER AND LARGE SCALE FARMERS.

8.4 GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY PREPARED A REPORT AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION BASED ON THE VIEWS EMANATING FROM THE SUMMIT. THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OUTLINES THE PROGRAMMES, PROJECTS AND INTERVENTIONS THAT NEED TO BE ACCELERATED IN ORDER TO TRANSFORM THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN THE COUNTRY. THE SAME REPORT WILL BE USED FOR ENGAGING OUR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS LOCALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY TO SOLICIT SUPPORT FOR OUR VISION.

## **9 FOOD SECURITY**

9.1 GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY ESTABLISHED A STRONG BASE FOR ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY THROUGH FORMULATING KEY POLICIES TO GUIDE SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS. THESE INCLUDE THE COMPREHENSIVE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR POLICY AND THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY POLICY WHICH HAVE ALREADY BEEN APPROVED BY CABINET.

9.2 A FEW YEARS AGO GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED THE CONCEPT OF CROP COMPETITIONS AND I AM PLEASED TO SAY THAT THE PROGRAMME HAS RESULTED IN INCREASED PRODUCTION OF CROPS SUCH AS MAIZE AND VEGETABLES.

9.3 THERE HAS BEEN GREAT IMPROVEMENT IN THE AREA OF WATER AND IRRIGATION MANAGEMENT AND THIS HAS BEEN ACHIEVED THROUGH THE CONSTRUCTION OF EARTH DAMS. GOVERNMENT HAS CONSTRUCTED 5 EARTH DAMS UNDER THE SIPHOFANENI INKHUNDLA AND ONE DAM WAS CONSTRUCTED AT PARADYS AS PART OF THE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME. CURRENTLY EARTH DAMS ARE UNDER CONSTRUCTION UNDER THE DVOKODVWENI AND THE MAFUTSENI TINKHUNDLA. AT LIST 5 DAMS WILL BE CONSTRUCTED IN EACH OF THE ABOVE TINKHUNDLA IN ORDER TO HELP THE RESIDENTS.

9.4 GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO INTENSIFY THE PROGRAMME OF CONSTRUCTION OF EARTH DAMS IN THE RURAL AREAS BECAUSE THEY HELP BOTH THE PEOPLE, AND THEIR LIVESTOCK. THIS PROGRAMME WILL CONTINUE DURING THE FORTHCOMING YEAR IN OTHER TINKHUNDLA.

9.5 SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS WAS ALSO MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GOVERNMENT'S LARGEST PROJECT, THE LOWER USUTHU SMALLHOLDER IRRIGATION PROJECT (LUSIP). THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DAMS AND FEEDER CANAL SYSTEM IS ALMOST COMPLETE.

WE EXPECT IMPOUNDMENT OF WATER TO COMMENCE IN APRIL 2008 WITH THE PLANTING OF THE FIRST 500 HECTARES SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER 2008.

9.6 I WISH TO COMMEND SWADE FOR THEIR HARD WORK IN ADVANCING THE PROJECT ACCORDING TO PLANNED SCHEDULES. MAY I ALSO THANK THE CHIEFS UNDER THE PROJECT FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION. WE LOOK FORWARD TO EVEN STRONGER COLLABORATION IN THE CHALLENGING PROCESS OF LAND ALLOCATION TO ENSURE THAT A LARGE MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM THE SCHEME.

9.7 WHILE WE MOVE FORWARD WITH LUSIP WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO SEE THAT THE KOMATI DOWNSTREAM DEVELOPMENT, WHICH IS SUPPORTED BY MAGUGA DAM, CONTINUES TO MAKE GREAT STRIDES. THIS YEAR THE FARMERS HAVE COLLECTIVELY GENERATED ABOUT E80 MILLION. THE FIRST FARMER GROUP UNDER THE SCHEME PAID OFF ITS LOAN AND WILL NOW BE READY TO REAP THE FRUIT OF THE LABOUR. WE EXPECT TO SEE MORE FARMER ASSOCIATIONS GRADUATE THE SAME WAY IN THE COMING YEARS.

## **10 EU BEEF MARKETS**

10.1 GOVERNMENT WISHES TO ENCOURAGE FARMERS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ACCESS OF OUR BEEF TO THE EUROPEAN UNION BEEF MARKETS. WE NEED TO DIVERSIFY OUR FARMING AND MAKE SURE THAT WE MEET THE QUOTA THAT HAS BEEN ALLOCATED TO US.

## **11. POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY AND ACTION PROGRAMME**

11.1 HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO DEAL SQUARELY WITH THE ISSUE OF POVERTY. THERE ARE CURRENTLY THREE INTERVENTIONS THAT ADDRESS POVERTY AND EFFECTS OF HIV & AIDS. THESE INCLUDE THE RECENTLY APPROVED POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY AND ACTION PROGRAMME (PRSAP), THE DECENTRALIZATION POLICY AND THE NATIONAL MULTI-SECTORAL HIV/AIDS POLICY, STRATEGIC PLAN AND ACTION PLAN.

11.2 HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT OVERALL GOAL IS TO REDUCE THE PREVALENCE OF POVERTY FROM 69% TO 30% BY 2015, WHICH IS IN LINE WITH THE MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDG'S) TARGETS,

AND ERADICATE IT COMPLETELY BY 2022 IN LINE WITH THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (NDS).

11.3 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRSAP WILL INTRODUCE REFORMS THAT WILL MAKE PLANNING AND BUDGETING PRO-POOR AND PRO-GROWTH. GOVERNMENT IS CURRENTLY DEVELOPING AN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR THE PRSAP.

## **12 HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE**

12.1 IN AUGUST, THIS YEAR HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT LAUNCHED THE NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY WHICH SIGNALLED A NEW ERA IN THE QUEST TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO RELEVANT QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE HEALTH SERVICES.

12.2 TO OPERATIONALISE THE POLICY, GOVERNMENT HAS EMBARKED ON A PROCESS TO DEVELOP AND FINALIZE THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN. IT PROVIDES A ROADMAP FOR THE HEALTH SECTOR AND ALSO IMPROVE COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION AMONGST STAKEHOLDERS WITH A VIEW TO MAXIMIZE AVAILABLE RESOURCES, AND CONSEQUENTLY ACHIEVE A GREATER IMPACT ON HEALTH SERVICES.

12.3 DURING THIS FINACIAL YEAR MEDICAL EQUIPMENT WAS PURCHASED AND INSTALLED IN VARIOUS HEALTH FACILITIES. THE INSTITUTIONS THAT BENEFITED INCLUDE MBABANE GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL, PIGGS PEAK GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL, DVOKOLWAKO HEALTH CENTRE AND EMKHUZWENI HEALTH CENTRE.

12.4 GOVERNMENT ALSO EMBARKED ON A PROCESS TO IMPROVE THE DRUG TRACKING AND PATIENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AS WELL AS TO INTEGRATE THE TWO SYSTEMS. THIS ENDEAVOR WILL SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE MONITORING OF THE ANTE RETROVIRAL TREATMENT (ART) RESPONSE IN THE COUNTRY BY WAY OF PRODUCING ENHANCED DATA QUALITY AND REPORTS.

12.5 THE PROCESS OF DISBURSING GRANTS TO THE ELDERLY WAS FURTHER REVIEWED AND IMPROVED IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE THE PROBLEMS THAT ARE ENCOUNTERED BY THE ELDERLY WHEN THEY ACCESS THEIR GRANTS. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THE NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES HAS INCREASED FROM 33 000 TO 47 252 SINCE THE DISBURSEMENT PROCESS BEGAN.

## **13 HIV&AIDS**

13.1 THE RECENT 2006/7 DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEY WHICH INCLUDED HIV TESTING AT NATIONAL LEVEL REVEALED THAT AT LEAST 26% OF MEN AND WOMEN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 15-49 ARE INFECTED BY HIV.

13.2 HOWEVER THERE IS HOPE THAT THE PREVALENCE RATE WILL DECREASE IN THE COMING FEW YEARS. IN LINE WITH THE THEME FOR THIS YEAR'S WORLD AIDS DAY, I URGE ALL OF US TO TAKE INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP TO ENSURE THAT NEW HIV INFECTIONS DO NOT OCCUR.

13.3 THE GLOBAL FUND HAS APPROVED OUR ROUND 7 PROPOSAL OF ABOUT E500 MILLION OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS. THE MONEY WILL BE USED TO STRENGTHEN EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF HIV IN SWAZILAND. THE COUNTRY IS INDEBTED TO GLOBAL FUND FOR APPROVING OUR REQUEST. MAY I ALSO THANK OTHER DONORS AND OUR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS WHO CONTINUE TO HELP US IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC. I ALSO WISH TO PLEDGE GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUING SUPPORT TO THE RESPONSE.

13.4 EFFORTS HAVE ALSO BEEN MADE TO ENHANCE THE DECENTRALIZATION AND EXPANDING HIV PREVENTION, TREATMENT, CARE AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO IMPROVE ACCESS.

## 14 **EDUCATION**

14.1 ONE OF THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC ON THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE IS THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN. GOVERNMENT HAS CONTINUED TO PROVIDE BURSARIES TO ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN. CONSULTATION WITH COMMUNITIES LED TO IMPROVED CO-OPERATION IN THE IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN.

14.2 THIS INITIATIVE BY GOVERNMENT IS FURTHER SUPPORTED BY TWO OTHER PROGRAMMES. THESE ARE: THE PLAN OF ACTION FOR ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S CO-ORDINATION UNIT, UNDER THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, TO ENSURE THE CO-ORDINATION OF ALL PROGRAMMES AIMED AT CHILDREN.

14.3 GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO PROVIDING QUALITY EDUCATION. A NUMBER OF INITIATIVES ARE CURRENTLY UNDERWAY, WHICH INCLUDE POLICY REFORM, IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION. FURTHERMORE, HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WORLD BANK, IS ENGAGED IN A SECTOR STUDY TO LOOK INTO ALL LEVELS OF EDUCATION WITH A VIEW TO DEVELOPING AN EDUCATION SECTOR STRATEGIC PLAN THAT WILL INFORM POLICY DEVELOPMENT TO LEAD THE COUNTRY TO VISION 2022. I WISH TO THANK THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE WORLD BANK FOR THEIR SUPPORT.

14.4 GOVERNMENT IS ALSO FOCUSING ON IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION. IN SUPPORT OF THIS OBJECTIVE, THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEVERAL PIECES OF LEGISLATION IS ON-GOING. THESE INCLUDE AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL OF SWAZILAND FOR REGULARIZATION OF ALL CERTIFICATION AWARDED IN THE COUNTRY; THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT TO NORMALIZE THE OPERATIONS OF THE COUNTRY'S INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING AND PUT IN PLACE MACHINERY FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIVATE COLLEGES;

AND AMENDMENT AND UPDATING OF THE EDUCATION ACT AND TEACHING SERVICE ACT.

## **15 GENDER**

15.1 HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF GENDER EQUITY IN THE COUNTRY. WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE THIS THROUGH A MULTI-SECTORAL AND INTEGRATED APPROACH.

15.2 I AM ALSO PLEASED TO SAY THAT THE EUROPEAN UNION HAS ASSISTED US WITH FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF ONE MILLION EUROS ( ABOUT 8.5 MILLION EMALANGENI) IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THE DOMESTICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW). THE UNDP HAS ALSO ASSISTED US WITH \$400, 000, 00 ( ABOUT 2.4 MILLION EMALANGENI) MILLIONFOR THE SAME PROGRAMME AND I AM CONFIDENT THAT THE RESOURCES WILL BE PUT INTO GOOD USE.

15.3 LIKE ALL OTHER COUNTRIES THAT HOLD WOMEN IN HIGH ESTEEM, GOVERNMENT, WORKING HAND IN HAND WITH THE UN GENDER THEME GROUP, CONDUCTED FOUR REGIONAL DIALOGUES ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

THE REGIONAL DIALOGUES WERE LED BY MEN AND THE THEME WAS "ENDING IMPUNITY FOR VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN".

## **16 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONSTITUTION AND EFFORTS AT IMPROVING GOVERNANCE**

16.1 DURING THE YEAR UNDER REVIEW, GOVERNMENT HAS PUSHED RELENTLESSLY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONSTITUTION. IN THIS REGARD, A CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE WAS ESTABLISHED TO ENSURE THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONSTITUTION. THE NATION IS AWARE THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS, SET OUT IN THE CONSTITUTION HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED.

16.2 GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO EMBARKED IN A PROCESS TO UPDATE AND REALIGN THE EXISTING PIECES OF LEGISLATION WITH THE CONSTITUTION. TO SUCCESSFULLY UNDERTAKE THIS EXERCISE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN SOUGHT AND OBTAINED FROM SOME OF OUR CO-OPERATING PARTNERS; THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT, UNDP AND EUROPEAN UNION.

16.3 THE COMMONWEALTH HAS SECONDED TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S CHAMBERS TWO LEGAL DRAFTSPERSONS TO STRENGTHEN THE LEGAL DRAFTING SECTION OF THE CHAMBERS. WE WISH TO THANK OUR CO-OPERATING PARTNERS FOR THIS INVALUABLE SUPPORT.

16.4 THE OTHER FOCUS OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN THE REFORM AND STRENGTHENING OF THE JUDICIARY WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON MEETING THE CHALLENGES IMPOSED BY THE CONSTITUTION. IN THIS REGARD WE PAY HOMAGE TO HIS MAJESTY, THE KING FOR APPOINTING THE CHIEF JUSTICE, WHO IS TASKED WITH THE FUNCTION OF ENSURING THAT THE JUDICIARY FUNCTIONS EFFECTIVELY.

## **17 LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

17.1 THE COUNTRY'S NATIONAL CONSTITUTION PROVIDES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SINGLE COUNTRY-WIDE SYSTEM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, BASED ON THE TINKHUNDLA SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE. GOVERNMENT THEREFORE ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE DECENTRALIZATION POLICY AND PROGRAMMES. A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES HAVE ALREADY BEEN DECENTRALISED. CURRENTLY ON-GOING IS THE DRAFTING OF ENABLING LEGISLATION.

17.2 GOVERNMENT IS ALSO COMMITTED TO EMPOWER THE PEOPLE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. RECENTLY SUCCESSFUL LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS WERE HELD AND IT IS GOVERNMENT'S HOPE THAT THE NEWLY ELECTED COUNCILORS WILL CONTINUE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THE ELECTORATE IN DEVELOPING THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS.

17.3 I AM GLAD TO REPORT THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (UDP) FOR MBABANE AND MANZINI WHICH COMMENCED IN THE 1990S IS NOW AT COMPLETION STAGE.

17.4 FOLLOWING ON FROM THE UDP, THE MBABANE CITY COUNCIL IS CURRENTLY PREPARING A PROJECT WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF CITIES ALLIANCE TO UPGRADE THE REMAINING INFORMALLY SETTLED AREAS, TO ACHIEVE A CITY WITHOUT SLUMS BY 2015.

## **18 DISASTER MANAGMENT**

**18.1** THE YEAR 2007 HAS NOT BEEN A GOOD YEAR FOR OUR COUNTRY WHEN IT COMES TO DISASTERS. WE EXPERINECED A DEVASTATING DROUGHT, HAIL STORMS AND WILD FIRES, WHICH CAUSED MASSIVE DEVASTATION.

FOLLOWING THESE PHENOMENON, HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT DECLARED A NATIONAL DISASTER.

18.2 AS THE NATION IS AWARE THAT HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ABLE TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE MOST OF THE AFFECTED BY THESE CALAMITIES. GOVERNMENT PURCHASED FOOD FOR DISTRIBUTION TO THOSE AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT. WATER WAS ALSO PROVIDED TO A NUMBER OF THE SEVERELY AFFECTED COMMUNITIES, THROUGH DIRECT SUPPLY OF WATER USING WATER TANKERS AND DRILLING BOREHOLES AND INSTALLATION OF HAND PUMPS.

18.3 FOR FAMILIES THAT HAD THEIR HOMES COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY THE FIRE, TWO-ROOMED HOUSES WERE CONSTRUCTED. FOOD PACKAGES AND SURVIVAL KITS WERE ALSO SUPPLIED TO THOSE WHO WERE LEFT WITHOUT FOOD, CLOTHING AND HOUSEHOLD UTENSILS.

18.5 WE WISH TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PASS OUR SINCERE APPRECIATION TO OUR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS WHO SUPPORTED US DURING THIS TIME OF NEED.

18.6 FURTHERMORE, OUR APPRECIATION GOES TO THE COMPANIES, WHICH ALTHOUGH AFFECTED BY THE FOREST FIRES; ALSO EXTENDED A HAND OF SUPPORT TO SOME OF THE FIRE VICTIMS TO REBUILD THEIR HOMES.

18.7 MAY I ALSO THANK THE NGO COMMUNITY, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND MEMBERS OF THE UMBUTFO SWAZILAND DEFENCE FORCE FOR THEIR HELP.

18.8 IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT IN FUTURE WE WILL BE ABLE TO MORE EFFECTIVELY RESPOND TO DISASTERS, GOVERNMENT HAS ESTABLISHED A FULLY FLEDGED DISASTER MANAGEMENT AGENCY WHICH WILL BECOME FULLY OPERATIONAL IN 2008.

## **19. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**

19.1 GOVERNMENT IS AGGRESSIVELY FOLLOWING A PROGRAMME OF IMPROVING ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE WITH PAVED ROADS INCREASING BY 20% SINCE 2000 CREATING 1, 171 KM OF IMPROVED ROAD NETWORK.

19.2 THE MLIBA-MADLANGEMPISI-TSHANENI (MR5) ROAD, AND THE MADLANGEMPISI – MSAHWENI ROAD (MR 6) ARE NOW COMPLETE AND OPEN TO TRAFFIC.

THE REHABILITATION OF THE SALEM-MAHAMBAMBA AND LAVUMISA TO BIG-BEND ROADS ARE ALSO COMPLETE AND OPEN TO TRAFFIC.

19.3 THE ON-GOING CONSTRUCTION OF THE NGWENYA TO MANZINI ROAD, WILL INCREASE THE PAVED/TARRED ROAD NETWORK TO 1396 KM IN TOTAL BY SEPTEMBER 2008.

19.4 THROUGH THE RURAL ELECTRIFICATION PROGRAMME, THE ELECTIRICY INFRASTRUCTURE HAS BEEN IMPROVED. ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY IN RURAL AREAS HAS INCREASED, COVERING A NUMBER OF CLINICS, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES. THIS PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTES IMMENSELY TO GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS AT POVERTY ALLEVIATION. FUNDING FOR THIS INITIATIVE HAS COME FROM THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON TAIWAN AND THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND. WE WISH TO THANK THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON TAIWAN FOR THE SUPPORT GIVEN AND WE HOPE THAT THEY WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT US.

19.5 IT IS HOPED THAT THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) POLICY THAT WAS APPROVED BY GOVERNMENT, WILL FACILITATE THE UPDGRADING OF OUR ICT INFRASTRUCTURE.

THIS EFFORT WILL BE FURTHER BOLSTERED BY THE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INFORMATION AND MEDIA POLICY.

## **20 WATER AND SANITATION**

20.1 THE PREVAILING DROUGHT SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY HAS SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED OUR MAIN SOURCES OF WATER SUPPLY. DAM WATER LEVELS HAVE GONE DOWN. IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT I URGE ALL OF US TO USE WATER SPARINGLY AND TO EMPLOY WATER CONSERVATION TECHNOLOGIES. WE THANK THE LORD THE ALMIGHTY FOR THE RAINS THE COUNTRY HAS RECEIVED AND WE REQUEST THE NATION TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THESE BLESSINGS.

20.2 GOVERNMENT AIMS TO PROVIDE POTABLE WATER TO ALL CITIZENS OF THE COUNTRY. A NUMBER OF COMMUNITY BASED SCHEMES SUCH AS THOSE AT MBHIKWAKHE, KUPHELENI AND SIWENI HAVE BEEN COMPLETED. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE E 120 MILLION LOMAHASHA – SITEKI WATER SUPPLY PROJECT IS ON-GOING.

20.3 I AM ALSO PLEASED TO SAY THAT, GOVERNMENT IS ABOUT TO SIGN AN AGREEMENT WITH THE REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE IN ORDER TO GET TREATED WATER FROM MOZAMBIQUE TO THE LOMASHA AREA. CONSULTATIONS ARE ALSO ON-GOING WITH THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA FOR A FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT THAT WILL FACILITATE CROSS-ACCES TO WATER IN THESE TWO COUNTRIES.

## **21 LIBERALISATION OF KEY SECTORS**

21.1 THERE HAVE BEEN MAJOR REFORMS OF THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR OF INSURANCES AND RETIREMENTS HAS BEEN A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT FOR THE COUNTRY. THE NEW INSTITUTION WILL PROVIDE REGULATION IN THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY.

21.2 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE ALSO MARKED THE END OF THE MONOPOLY, WHICH WAS ENJOYED BY THE ROYAL SWAZILAND INSURANCE IN THE COUNTRY.

21.3 THE RETIREMENT FUND ACT WHICH WILL BE ADMINISTERED BY THE REGISTRAR ALLOWS CITIZENS TO USE THEIR RETIREMENT FUNDS POLICIES AS COLLATERAL WHEN ACQUIRING LOANS FOR BUILDING ON SWAZI NATION LAND.

GOVERNMENT IS EXCITED WITH THIS VENTURE AS IT SEEKS TO IMPROVE THE LIVING STANDARDS OF THE NATION AS IT WILL ENCOURAGE THE SWAZIS TO DEVELOP THEIR PROPERTIES ON SWAZI NATIONAL LAND.

21.4 THE ELECTRICITY AND ENERGY SECTOR HAS ALSO BEEN LIBERALISED, WITH THE CONVERSION OF THE SWAZILAND ELECTRICITY BOARD FROM BEING A BOARD TO A COMPANY.

## **22 SAFETY AND SECURITY**

22.1 HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE IMPROVING AND MAINTAINING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IN THE COUNTRY. GOVERNMENT ACKNOWLEDGES AND DEEPLY APPRECIATE THE ROLE PLAYED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ASSISTING THE ROYAL SWAZILAND POLICE SERVICE AND OTHER SECURITY FORCES AND ORGANS IN FIGHTING CRIME IN THE COUNTRY.

22.2 I WISH TO APPEAL TO EVERYONE IN THE COUNTRY TO CONTINUE GIVING THEIR SUPPORT IN THE YEARS AHEAD. MAY I SPECIFICALLY THANK THE GOOD WORK WHICH IS DONE BY THE COMMUNITY POLICE.

22.3 WHILST WE HAVE POSITIVE STATISTICS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CRIME, I AM AWARE THAT THERE ARE OTHER AREAS WHERE WE STILL HAVE TO IMPROVE ESPECIALLY IN HOMICIDE (MURDER) AND ARMED ROBBERY AND FRAUD AMONGST OTHER CRIMES.

23. **40/40 ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS**

23.1 MAY I ALSO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO INFORM THE NATION THAT NEXT YEAR THE COUNTRY WILL BE CELEBRATING ITS 40 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE AND 40<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY OF HIS MAJESTY, THE KING AND INGWENYMA. INDEED THERE IS A MAMMOTH TASK BEFORE US IN ORDER TO MAKE SURE THAT THIS BECOMES A GREAT SUCCESS.

23.2 AS A NATION WE HAVE COME FROM A LONG WAY, A LOT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT WE HAVE REACHED A NUMBER OF MILESTONES SINCE WE ATTAINED INDEPENDENCE HENCE WE HAVE ALL THE REASON TO CELEBRATE. THOSE WHO WERE AROUND IN 1968 CAN CONFIRM THAT SINCE WE TOOK THE BATON FROM 6<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1968 UP TO THE PRESENT TIME, WE HAVE RUN A GOOD RACE. NONETHELESS, WHILST WE HAVE BEEN VICTORIOUS IN OTHER FRONTS THERE ARE STILL CHALLENGES THAT HAVE TO BE ADDRESSED.

## 24 **FUTURE CHALLENGES**

24.1 AS I CONCLUDE MY STATEMENT, I WISH TO SAY THAT AS MUCH AS WE HAVE MADE SOME STRIDES IN A NUMBER OF AREAS, WE STILL HAVE THE TASK OF ADDRESSING EXISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES, WHICH INCLUDE, BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE FOLLOWING:

- a) IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTH FACILITIES AND QUALITY OF HEALTH AND AGGRESSIVE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS.
- b) REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT BY CREATING INVESTMENT PROMOTION FOR FOREIGN DIRECT AND DOMESTIC INVESTMENT.
- c) IMPLEMENTING POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY.
- d) ENSURING THE CONTINUED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONSTITUTION.
- e) ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT DECENTRALIZATION AND DELIVERY OF SERVICES.

- f) IMPROVING AND ENHANCING THE PROCUREMENT SYSTEM AND ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS AND PAYMENT OF SUPPLIERS WITHIN REASONABLE TIME.
- g) EXPANDING THE REVENUE BASE TO GUARANTEE CERTAINTY OF THE NATIONAL BUDGET.
- h) IMPLEMENTING AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE REVENUE COLLECTION SYSTEM TO IMPROVE OUR REVENUE COLLECTION.
- i) EXPANDING AND MAINTAINING OUR LOCAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS.
- j) STRENGTHENING EFFORTS TO FIGHT CRIME AND ENHANCE SAFETY AND SECURITY IN THE COUNTRY.
- k) IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY BY FULLY IMPLEMENTING THE DIFFERENT POLICIES AND AGRICULTURAL AND IRRIGATION PROGRAMMES.
- l) ENSURING THAT RURAL ELECTRIFICATION AND POTABLE WATER PROGRAMMES ARE IMPLEMENTED.

- m) ENSURING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN INCLUDING ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN.
- n) NEXT YEAR THE COUNTRY WILL BE CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE AND HIS MAJESTY'S 40<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY. GOVERNMENT WILL ENSURE THAT ALL THE LOGISTICS FOR THE 40/40 DOUBLE CELEBRATIONS ANNIVERSARY ARE IN PLACE.
- o) NEXT YEAR THE COUNTRY IS ALSO EXPECTED TO HOLD NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. AS A NATION WE SHOULD EXERCISE OUR RIGHT TO VOTE, HOWEVER WE NEED TO TAKE COGNIZANCE OF GENDER EQUITY DURING THIS PROCESS.

## **25 CONCLUSION:**

**25.1** ON BEHALF OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT AND MY OWN BEHALF I WISH THE NATION A YEAR FULL OF SUCCESS. I PRAY THAT AS A NATION WE WILL EXPLORE AND EXPLOIT ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT 2008 WILL BRING.

**25.2** MAY I ALSO APPRECIATE THE CO-OPERATION, TEAM SPIRIT AND SUPPORT THAT EXISTS IN CABINET. COLLECTIVELY WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS SOME OF THE KEY CHALLENGES THAT THE COUNTRY IS FACING. MY SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ALSO GOES TO THE HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT FOR THE HEALTHY AND CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATES THAT WE HAVE HAD IN THE PAST YEAR, WHICH HAVE LED TO A NUMBER OF BILLS GOING THROUGH THE AUGUST HOUSES AND ENACTED INTO LAW.

**25.3** IN CONCLUSION, I WISH TO PLEDGE MY PERSONAL COMMITMENT AND THE SUPPORT OF MY COLLEAGUES IN CABINET TO ENSURE THAT THE COUNTRY CONTINUES TO ENJOY PEACE, STABILITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH, WHILST AT THE SAME TIME CREATING OPPORTUNITES FOR JOB CREATION AND INVESTMENT.

MAY GOD BLESS THE NATION AND HAVE A PROSPEROUS 2008.

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

30<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2007