



STATEMENT DELIVERED

BY

**HONOURABLE DIKGAKGAMATSO RAMADELUKA SERETSE, MP
MINISTER OF DEFENCE, JUSTICE AND SECURITY
AND ACTING MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING

**OF THE 10TH REGIONAL SEMINAR FOR THE ACP-EU
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INTERESTS GROUPS
ON MONDAY 29th JUNE, 2009**

**Venue: GICC
TIME: 0900-1000 HOURS**

Master of Ceremonies,

Your Excellency, Mr Jahier, President of the Follow-up Committee of the 10th Regional Seminar of the ACP-EU Economic and Social Committee;

Your Excellency, Ambassador Paul Malin, Head of the European Commission Delegation to Botswana;

Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International Organizations;

Representatives of Regional Organizations, Non Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Organizations;

Ms Lyod, Chairperson of the Botswana organizing committee of the 10th Regional Seminar of the ACP-EU Economic and Social Interests Groups;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. It is a distinct honour for me to welcome you all to Botswana this morning. As a country, we are extremely delighted to host you for this auspicious event which brings together Non State Actors under a Regional Seminar for the ACP-EU Economic and Social Interest Groups. I am informed that this seminar has brought together representatives from ACP and EU member states, representatives of regional organizations and civil society organizations in and outside our borders and representatives of other international organizations.

2. It is therefore, my ardent hope that our hospitality will meet your satisfaction to enable you to derive full benefit for which you had intended the event for.

Distinguished Delegates,

3. Hardly a few weeks ago, His Honour the Vice President, Lieutenant General Mompoti Merafhe held a similar task when he was invited to share some moments with Non Governmental Organizations during an event marking the NGO week held here in Gaborone. Such a close working relationship between Government and Civil Society Organizations is a true reflection of a healthy environment which exists to promote activities of Non State Actors in the country.

4. Our gathering here today is yet another symbolic gesture of the true spirit of the ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement, a development cooperation which is based on a strong foundation of which political dialogue is a key aspect of.

5. The Cotonou Agreement, which began initially as a framework agreement for trade and development aid, is no doubt one of the most successful development cooperation arrangements in place today, which brings together four large regional groupings of Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific to fulfill a common objective of poverty reduction, while contributing to sustainable development

without undermining the equality of its partners. It is this unique form of relationship that has seen our partnership under Cotonou Agreement remain intact, amid emerging global challenges.

6. The second review of the Cotonou Agreement, now in the offing will require us to re-double our efforts to seek new ways of making our partnership more effective in dealing with new emerging issues such as; global financial crisis, food insecurity and climate change, some of which I note with great satisfaction are reflected on your agenda.

7. We are however, equally cognizant of the fact that as new global challenges emerge amid new socio-economic and political orientations, so is the need to adapt the scope and quality of our partnership !

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outstanding work carried out by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) across our country since pre-independence. Some of these organizations have persevered working in most difficult conditions to carry out tasks under extremely difficult conditions. Charity organizations and humanitarian associations such as Churches, the Red Cross, SOS, YWCA to name, but a few, have all played an instrumental role in collaboration with Government to uplift the standards of living of the less privileged members of our communities.

9. Before our country's independence, some of our oldest schools and health-care facilities in the country were run by Missionaries. During those days, Missionaries have worked tirelessly in most difficult conditions to alleviate disease, hunger and poverty in remote parts of our country.

10. At post-independence, while Government was faced with virtually no financial resources against rising expectations from our people for more and better services, Civil Society Organizations stood ready to assist by way of mobilizing external support to help Government to expand its out-reach.

11. To-date, Civil Society Organizations continue to work side by side to compliment Government's efforts by availing resources and expertise in many areas where Government continues to face challenges of acute skill and manpower shortage such as in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

12. It is for this reason that Government saw it fit to put in place structures and policies, amongst others, the NGO Policy of 2004 to harmonize the relationship between Government, Non-Governmental Organizations and the Private Sector. We see it as an obligation on the part of Government to ensure the smooth functioning of Non State Actors as full partners in the development of our country.

13. Such a versatile relationship is not only deeply entrenched in our culture, but is also supported by the country's national pillars of self reliance, democracy, development and unity. It is therefore, our view that an organized civil society has an important role to play in complimenting government to achieve its national development goals and objectives.

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

14. I must say it is gratifying to see continued efforts made by international donor agencies and our cooperating development partners such as the EU who continue to compliment our efforts in this regard. During the 9th EDF, the EU assisted Botswana Government with 6.5 Million Euros for a programme intended to assist in strengthening the capacity of the Non State Actors. The Programme which began in 2008 will run until 2011.

15. By the same vain, I like to take this opportunity to re-assure all our cooperating partners of our commitment as a country to ensure continued promotion of global partnerships for development.

16. I therefore, wish to take this opportunity to commend the organizers of this seminar for this initiative. The seminar provides a good opportunity to further strengthen existing partnerships between Government and Non-State Actors by further enhancing the quality of our dialogue with our European partners in many issues of mutual concern, including ongoing ACP-EU Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

17. Once again, let me thank you for honouring me with an invitation to address you this morning and to wish you fruitful deliberations.

18. I thank you.