

**SPEECH BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE PRIME
MINISTER HIS EXCELLENCY NTATE PAKALITHA
MOSISILI AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
MEETING OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT
CONFERENCE (SADC) MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE
FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR AND SOCIAL
PARTNERS HELD FROM 31 MARCH – 4 APRIL
2008, IN MASERU LESOTHO.**

**His Majesty King Letsie III,
Honourable President of Senate,
Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly,
Your Lordship the Chief Justice,
Honourable Deputy Prime Minister,
Honourable Ministers, in particular our
Honourable Guests from the Region
Honourable Judges of the High Court
Your Excellencies Heads of Diplomatic Mission and
Heads of International Organizations,
Honourable Attorney General,**

**Honourable Members of Parliament,
Government Secretary and Senior Government
Officials,
Distinguished Representatives of Employers and
Workers Organisations,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

On behalf of the Government and people of Lesotho and indeed on my own behalf, I am honoured and privileged to officiate at this very important meeting of the SADC Ministers responsible for Employment and Labour, and Social Partners. In doing so, allow me to welcome you, Honourable Ministers, distinguished Social Partners, and other dignitaries here present, to the Kingdom of Lesotho. We are grateful that despite your demanding responsibilities, you made the time to attend this meeting.

Let me also extend our invitation to you all, to take advantage of your short visit and stay a little longer, to enjoy the serenity and hospitality of our beautiful Mountain Kingdom. Feel free to visit the interior of the country to experience first hand the friendliness of Basotho and the fresh air of the Maloti Mountains. We are very high in altitude, having the highest lowest point above sea level in the world. That puts us very close to God. So, do take time to talk to Him while you are here. Chances of your prayers being heard and answered are enhanced by our proximity to heaven!

Programme Director,

Allow me at the outset, to commend Honourable Ministers and Social Partners for the wisdom to revive the Southern African Development Community Employment and Labour Sector (SADC ELS). The SADC ELS or Southern African Labour Commission (SALC), as it was

previously known, has always been in the forefront in responding through social dialogue, to political, socio-economic, and technological development challenges in the sector. The Social Dialogue involving the tripartite structures of Governments, organized Business, and organized Labour, provides a unique opportunity for consultations and frank discussions between stakeholders. It also offers us the opportunity to work together as a region, taking advantage of each other's skills, and strengths.

The SADC Employment and Labour Sector was able to exert its influence on the international arena, the African Union, and the International Labour Organisation, on issues pertaining to human rights at the world of work; issues relating to child labour and rights of women, youth and persons with disabilities; issues of HIV and AIDS; of employment and the right to employment; of enhancing productivity; of decent work; and of fair remuneration, to name but a few. This was made possible by the common

vision and goals of Governments, Employers and Workers from the SADC Region through the Employment and Labour Sector. The resuscitation of the Employment and Labour Sector is therefore a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, I have been informed that despite the common position taken at both sub-regional and regional levels, SADC and the African Union Labour and Social Affairs Commission, failed to agree on the candidature for the Chairmanship of the International Labour Conference for 2007, during their meetings held in Addis Ababa and Geneva, respectively. I do realize that this did not happen because of the Labour and Employment Sector. However, we all carry the blame because of our collective responsibility. It is my sincere hope that we will brief our Ambassadors accordingly and give them the mandate to ensure that we attain consensus on issues of common interest.

Programme Director,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa faces a lot of challenges today which include, high unemployment, the scourge of HIV and AIDS, stagnating economies, to cite but a few examples. In this regard, the SADC region is not an exception. We are, however, encouraged by the bold steps taken by the SADC Employment and Labour Sector to address and redress these problems.

It cannot be overemphasized that it is through dialogue and engagement that we can resolve some of the problems facing us. Although dialogue is not the panacea to all ills of the Employment and Labour Sector, it provides an environment for obtaining answers and solutions to problems and challenges, provided those engaged in dialogue do so in good faith and are genuine, truthful and committed to the course.

A good example is the case of elections in Africa. It is common knowledge that in most African countries, political parties that lose elections always cry foul instead of conceding defeat. This is the case even where elections are conducted by Independent Electoral Commissions or other relevant electoral authorities, and are declared transparent, free, fair and credible by both local and international observers. More often than not, leaders of such political parties incite political unrest, leading to violations of human rights and non-observance of the rule of law. Such behaviour is counter development. It not only threatens our fledgling democracy, but our economies as well, as it scares away local and international investors responsible for the creation of employment in our countries. It is therefore absolutely critical, particularly for employers and workers not to fall prey to the antics and machinations of those politicians who do NOT accept defeat at the polls. We must all of us teach them to accept the will of the people

expressed through ballots. After all, “vox populi, vox Dei” (the voice of the people (is) the voice of God).

By the same token I urge politicians in Africa, particularly in the SADC region, to take their cue from the Employment and Labour Sector, and engage in dialogue to resolve political issues. A lot of potentially serious problems can be resolved through dialogue.

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The revival of the SADC Employment and Labour Sector comes at a critical time when Africa, including the SADC region, has to transform and adapt to the realities of globalization. As Ministers responsible for labour and employment, and as Social Partners, I need not overemphasize to you the challenges brought by globalization. You are in the best position to know. However, it is very important for us in Africa to embrace

globalization and use it to our advantage, rather than reject it.

With the advent of globalization, the world has turned into a manageable global village. Decisions are taken promptly and movement of capital is equally easy. Why can't we do the same with the movement of labour? We have tended to look at labour migration in a bad light, characterizing it negatively as "brain drain". Yet countries like Ireland have demonstrated that in the long term the so-called brain drain can pay handsome dividends, as the migrants plough back skills and other resources to their home countries. It is my firm belief that the time is ripe for the Ministers of Employment and Labour, and Social Partners, to consider seriously the SADC Protocol on Migration. Such an instrument will not only facilitate movement of labour but will also ensure that migrants enjoy the same rights and protection as those enjoyed by citizens in the relevant social formations. Furthermore, let us also ensure that as we

move towards regional integration, which is the ultimate goal of SADC, issues of labour migration are taken on board.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we already know, our region is plagued by high unemployment and high poverty levels. These have an adverse effect on our peoples, particularly the youth, women, people with disabilities, the elderly, and the orphans. It is therefore incumbent upon us, Ministers of Labour and Employment, and Social Partners, to address this situation in earnest.

Many of you will recall that the AU Ouagadougou Declaration on Employment Creation and Poverty Alleviation calls upon us to ensure that employment is key to economic strategies in our countries. I therefore invite you to heed this call, particularly with respect to the employment of women and the youth.

In fact, I take this opportunity to challenge the Social Partners, especially the Employers, to engage governments on the type and relevance of education to the workplace. As Employers and Labour, you are best placed to know the human resource demands and requirements of our economies. You are the consumers of the product and can best inform curricula reform. Otherwise if our education and training institutions churn out unemployable products, it is not only unfair to those young men and women but also costly to the state that invests in their education and training. So, please engage your Ministers of Education so that we get value for money spent in education and training.

Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished delegates,

The scourge of HIV and AIDS is decimating high proportions of the able bodied sections of our

populations. This is a cause for concern that requires the attention of all of us. It is my sincere hope that the Employment and Labour Sector will devote its attention to the role the sector can play in combating the spread of the pandemic and providing mitigation measures. I know that this sector already has in place a SADC Protocol on HIV and AIDS at the Workplace, adopted in 1997. I do hope that the Protocol has by now been domesticated and implemented in our respective countries. The implementation of this Protocol, will go a long way in scaling up the fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic at the workplace and the stigma associated with it.

Another area of concern is social security. Social security in our countries is fragmented; it is not all inclusive; and it is limited in scope. We are all aware of the multiplicity of problems that confront our peoples because of inadequate social security. It is therefore incumbent upon you, Honourable Ministers, to urgently facilitate the

adoption of a Protocol on Social Security within the SADC.

On the international arena, it is very important that we strive for the representation of SADC at the highest level in international organizations. In this regard, it is imperative that SADC is represented in political positions of the International Labour Organisation. This should be a deliberate move from you, Honourable Ministers of the Employment and Labour Sector, and Social Partners. I am quite confident that with your commitment we will achieve this.

Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Social Partners,

In conclusion, allow me to once again reiterate our words of welcome to you, and wish you a pleasant stay and an unforgettable experience of the Mountain Kingdom or the Kingdom in the Sky as Lesotho is fondly called.

I wish you fruitful and successful deliberations and hope that the SADC Employment and Labour Sector has not only been revived but that it will also be rejuvenated with dynamic policies for the development of our region and our peoples.

It is now my singular honour and privilege to declare this meeting officially opened.

I thank you for your attention.