



STATEMENT OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN RELATION TO RECENT DECISIONS OF THE LESOTHO COALITION GOVERNMENT January 2016

As we begin this New Year, we the civil society formations in Lesotho, namely; Academic Forum for Development of Lesotho (AFDeI), Alliance of Progressive Trade Union (APTU), Lesotho Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), Lesotho Congress of Democratic Union (LECODU), Lesotho Council of NGOs (LCN), Lesotho Trade Union Congress (LTUC), Maseru Regional Transport Operators (MRTO) and The Law Society of Lesotho look forward to achieving the objectives of Lesotho's Vision 2020: a prosperous Lesotho where all work to take this country out of the prevailing economic condition of a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. We look back to 2015 and deplore financial and legislation related key decisions of the Government of Lesotho, outlined below, and their impact on Lesotho's frail economy. We release this statement in line with our commitment *to participate in all activities and discussions intended to promote sustainable development, peace, political stability, and social welfare locally, regionally and internationally*, in our overall endeavour to contribute to the economic development of our country.

The operations of the Government of Lesotho continue to intensify inequalities in the country, fail to provide for the poor and to subvert the engagement of citizens in democratic processes. This is demonstrated in the bad policy decisions such as writing-off of the loans of Members of the 8th Parliament, buying-out of senior government officers' employment contracts, purchase of government cars at 'residual values' by ministers and senior government officials (the infamous "likhapha tsa Basotho" scheme), engaging the services of a foreign company (Bidvest Car Rental) to provide and manage government's fleet, and the recent exclusion of civil society in the formulation of the Human Rights Commission Bill.

We are alarmed by the Government of Lesotho's loan scheme for MPs, where the state pays lending institutions interest and guarantees/underwrites loans of M500,000-600,000 for parliamentarians. The recently reported decision of the government to use taxes of this poor nation to pay off debts of MPs of the 8th Parliamentarian is callous and immoral in a country where more than 50% of the people live below national poverty line. From the beginning, the decision by this country's ruling elite to grant themselves the loans was reckless and amounted to a white-collar crime and the looting of public resources by those elected to manage them.

The decision of the government to systematically buy out the contracts of senior government officials of the previous regime is economically inconsiderate of the needs this poor nation and amounts to outright plunder of the country's limited resources. The same applies to the scheme where government vehicles are sold to officials (mainly ministers and senior public servants) at drastically undervalued "residual values" (e.g. a 3-year old Mercedes-Benz E-class sold for M4000). These policy decisions and practices are unjust, immoral and also violate all principles of good governance.

The six-month agreement between the government and South African *Bidvest Car Rental* deprived Basotho of an opportunity to benefit from their taxes. This agreement erodes revenue from Lesotho's economy and undermines Basotho's transport-related business efforts. The government's intransigent disregard of the citizens' call to reverse this arrangement is particularly disconcerting. We call on the Government to heed the call of the citizens, in particular, the petition of the country's Taxi Operators submitted in October 2015, to pull out of this agreement, and find ways by which Basotho transport operators can benefit from supplying the service to the government.

The government's hasty passing of the Human Rights Commission Bill through the National Assembly, excluding the meaningful contribution of the civil society sector is worrying. The engagement of multi-stakeholders in the law-making process is a key tenet of democracy and ensures formulation of just laws that reflect the concerns and interests of the citizens. The bill development process, despite the government's contention that it was consultative, has not followed the Paris Principles of 1991, which are the key international standards for human rights institutions. The resultant HRC is unlikely to either serve the interests of the Basotho or receive worldwide recognition that is so crucial for its effectiveness and credibility.

Against this background, we call on the government to take courageous and decent steps, in this New Year, and

- i) Reverse the decision to write-off the loans of Parliamentarians of the 8th Parliament because they can afford to service their loans;
- ii) Desist from making bad policies such as buying out senior government officials;
- iii) Ensure that voice of civil society is considered and reflected in the Human Rights Commission Bill.

Founded in 1990

The primary mission of the council is to stimulate, promote and support NGO's in their development effort. In pursuit of this mission, The National Council will assist its member organisations to diagnose and satisfy their own needs as well as the needs of the society they serve. It will assist member organisations to be increasingly more effective in meeting their goals and to be able to initiate and maintain self-supporting and self-sustaining development and, therefore, fulfil their role in the upliftment of the disadvantaged and underprivileged and society at large.

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