



The Commonwealth

Lesotho Investment Forum

Opening remarks

Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma

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Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, High Commissioner, Commonwealth friends...

It is a pleasure to address a few words to you at the outset of this meeting. I have fond and vivid memories of my visit to Lesotho three years ago: in April 2011. It is a country of great beauty and natural endowment, and the people - who welcomed us warmly - are an immense human resource.

Since my visit, parliamentary elections were held in May 2012. At the invitation of the Government of Lesotho we were pleased to deploy a Commonwealth Observer Group; and I invited Dr Bakili Muluzi, former President of Malawi, to chair the Group. As a result of those elections a coalition government was formed. This was a new experience for Lesotho, and the Commonwealth has been pleased to offer support in overcoming some of the administrative and governance challenges presented by such a political development. Responding to the request of the Government of Lesotho, the Commonwealth Secretariat has provided special assistance to strengthen dialogue between coalition partners and the functioning of the coalition government.

This is a fine example of Commonwealth co-operation, with guidance and expertise being drawn from New Zealand, another of our member states and one which has considerable experience of the particular administrative and political challenges of coalition government - especially within the Commonwealth context and understanding of parliamentary democracy, separation of powers, freedom of expression, and respect for human rights.

The Commonwealth Charter, adopted by the governments of our member states on behalf of all our citizens, recognises 'the importance of maintaining the integrity of the roles of the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary' as 'guarantors in their respective spheres of the rule of law, the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights and adherence to good governance'.

In adopting the Charter our member states also committed themselves to 'peaceful, open dialogue and the free flow of information, including through a free and responsible media, and to enhancing democratic traditions and strengthening democratic processes'.

Our Commonwealth understanding is that democracy and development are mutually reinforcing. Lesotho's active participation and contribution as a member of the Commonwealth family reflects its determination that the opportunities and benefits both of democracy and development should be advanced for all its people. This investment forum is a most welcome and practical demonstration of that resolve.

So too was the active participation and valuable contribution of the Prime Minister at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting last November. That meeting delivered an impressive range of outcomes – many of which have a substantial bearing on topics to be discussed at this forum.

A good number of these outcomes were carried further forward two weeks ago when Lesotho participated in the Third Global Biennial Conference on Small States. Co-hosted by the Commonwealth Secretariat and St Lucia – where it took place – the conference took as its theme 'Building Resilience in Small States'.

Progress was made on a number of practical areas for policy action towards sustainable economic growth. These include:

- a framework for building resilience of small states;
- solutions for small states indebtedness (building on the work of the Commonwealth High Level Group on Small States Debt, led by the Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis);
- a governance assessment framework for resilience-building in small states;
- environmental resource management and climate resilience; and
- social resilience building.

In closing, let me refer to the high priority accorded by the Commonwealth to ensuring more equitable access and opportunities for fuller participation by women and youth when addressing investment, entrepreneurship, and employment – and economic issues more generally.

This forum, in seeking to unlock and develop potential as yet untapped or underutilised, can truly work for the good of Lesotho and the Commonwealth if the ambitions, expectations and needs of all - particularly the excluded and disadvantaged - are kept in the forefront of our thinking at all times.