Remarks by
Ambassador Kelebone A. Maope, Permanent Representative of Lesotho to the UN during
WORLD FOOD DAY 2015
New York, 16 October 2015

I wish to add my voice in thanking the organizers of this event for inviting my Mission to participate in the event’s proceedings. It is also a privilege for me to take part in celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) which has been a reliable development partner of Lesotho since the attainment of her independence in 1966.

Lesotho is inhabited by a largely rural population, the majority of who are poor. World economic crises, such as the 2008 financial upheaval, usually have their greatest negative impact on these rural people despite their natural resilience.

Activities of the FAO in Lesotho dating from the 1960s have taken place in a very harsh environment of a lack of suitable land for crop production, which land is highly degraded¹ due to (1) misguided policies during the colonial period, as well as mismanaged human and animal activity, and (2) chaotic weather patterns of serious droughts followed by heavy rains.

Lesotho is characterized by high unemployment rates. At present the country is also facing the serious health problem of HIV and AIDS.

The country is outstanding for being over-studied and over-researched with respect to its development issues. Such research largely describes the problem, but offers no tangible solutions. International efforts to assist the country to develop economically have, in my view, amounted to no more than management of the country’s status quo of poverty. The country’s development problems are structural in nature and originate from the country’s colonial and apartheid-era past.

However, the momentous political developments that took place in South Africa 1994 offer Lesotho a better chance to overcome these structural problems and to independently manage her economic development. The US African Opportunity and Growth Act (AGOA) offers one other great opportunity for Lesotho to engage in the export trade. Yet it has been difficult to benefit from this opportunity because of lack of goods to trade with: Despite its high literacy rate, Lesotho’s educational system is not geared to producing technically qualified students in position to produce goods for trade. There are virtually no meaningful industries in the country. The Government is conscious of this shortcoming and is attempting to address it through vocational training.

Natural products of Lesotho include production of wool and mohair. At present this product is been exported to China, together with South African wool and mohair, as a raw material. Attempts to process the product and add value to it have so far been unsuccessful. There is a huge potential to establish cottage industries through the use of wool and mohair. Such industries would address rural poverty.

In order to address extreme poverty in Lesotho, the Government has established a relatively huge social safety net to protect poor members of society. In a recent evaluation report of the safety net by the World

¹ For the serious nature of land degradation in Lesotho, see Kate B. Showers, Imperial Gullies: Soil Erosion and Conservation in Lesotho, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005
Bank, 2 10 programs 3 are listed as constituting the net. The World Bank advocates better financial management of this social protection program and the use of some of its funds to create permanent economic opportunities.

In these circumstances, the FAO and the other UN development agencies 4 in Lesotho should assist Lesotho to transition from its present poverty trap into an industrialized country. There is urgent need to provide alternative employment opportunities to rural farming, so that a substantial number of people can move away from degrading the land.

Returning to FAO’s role of contributing to nutrition and ending hunger, the agency should assist Lesotho in the following endeavours:

1. **Scaling up soil conservation efforts in the country.** Here at the United Nations a momentous event took place in last September, namely, the conclusion of agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 15 requires the halting and reversing of land degradation and biodiversity loss. Target 15.3 calls for the achievement of land degradation neutrality by 2030. This is an ambitious program, but in the case of Lesotho, it is an imperative because there can be no meaningful production of food without land. It is time that the land degradation problem was confronted and serious attempts made to solve it. This will require a long-term strategy. Massive and co-ordinated financial resources from the UN development agencies are required to achieve this objective. There will have to be a major shift in their work methods by the FAO and other UN development agencies if they serious mean to assist Lesotho.

2. **Water supply infrastructure.** Many rural farmers are desirous of producing crops and raising animals in a sustainable manner, but water supply is unavailable to them. Rural women suffer most from lack of water for domestic use. (There is a connection between this objective and renewable energy mentioned below.)

3. **Preservation of food.** In Lesotho, within each normal year, there will be a season when food is plentiful, followed by a season of hunger. Unfortunately the population has lost its traditional methods of preserving food. Modern techniques for food preservation are to be taught, so that food can be conserved when it is plentiful, and subsequently consumed during the hunger season. (Again there will be energy requirements to power conservation equipment).

4. **Establishment of rural agro industries.** The basis of these could be value addition to wool and mohair and other animal products.

5. **Rural electrification through renewable energy.** Renewable energy technologies are most suitable for rural communities. One major natural resource of Lesotho is the sunshine which is even destructive at times. Solar energy technology would be most suitable for use by rural populations. But Lesotho is not to be turned into a market for other countries’ products: some of the technologies must be manufactured by Lesotho nationals.

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3 These are: (1) Child Grants Program; (2) Public Assistance; (3) Old Age Pension; (4) School Feeding Program; (5) Orphans and Vulnerable Children Bursary Scheme; (6) Nutrition Support Program; (7) Agricultural Input Fairs; (8) Integrated Watershed Management Public Works Program; (9) National Fertilizer and Input Subsidy; and (10) Tertiary Bursary Scheme

4 Other UN agencies in Lesotho are: UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, IFAD, UNEP, WFP, UNAIDS, WHO and World Bank Liaison Office.