



**ROYAL PALACE
KINGDOM OF LESOTHO**

**STATEMENT BY HIS MAJESTY KING LETSIE III OF THE KINGDOM
OF LESOTHO – FAO SPECIAL AMBASSADOR ON NUTRITION - ON
THE OCCASION OF WORLD FOOD DAY CELEBRATION IN ROME,
ITALY - 16th OCTOBER 2018**

**YOUR MAJESTY QUEEN LETIZIA OF SPAIN,
HONOURABLE MINISTERS HERE PRESENT,
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF FAO, MR JOSE GRAZIANO DA SILVA,
YOUR EXCELLENCIES HEADS OF DIPLOMATIC MISSION AND
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS,
HEADS OF THE UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES,
MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA,
DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.**

IT IS A GREAT HONOUR TO BE BACK IN ROME AND BE PART OF THIS MOMENTOUS CELEBRATION OF WORLD FOOD DAY AT THE GRACIOUS INVITATION OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION, MR JOSE GRAZIANO DA SILVA. THE FACT THAT THIS YEAR'S CELEBRATION COINCIDES WITH THE 73RD ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SHOULD PROVIDE ANOTHER VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY AND



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PLATFORM FOR ALL THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD TO RE-COMMIT THEMSELVES TO INCREASE THEIR COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TOWARDS TACKLING THE PROBLEMS OF FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION IN ALL ITS FORMS.

THIS YEAR'S CELEBRATION TAKES PLACE AT A TIME WHEN MALNUTRITION INDICATORS OF STUNTING, WASTING AND MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES ARE STILL REPORTED TO BE HIGH. THIS DISTURBING STATE OF AFFAIRS IS MORE PREVALENT AMONG THE DEVELOPING NATIONS AND CONTINUES TO CALL FOR OUR UNDEVIDED ATTENTION, AND WILL STILL REQUIRE US TO REDOUBLE OUR EFFORTS AND INCREASE OUR CO-OPERATION IN THIS TITANIC STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE A ZERO HUNGER WORLD BY 2030.

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

SINCE DECEMBER 2016 WHEN I ACCEPTED THE INVITATION OF THE FAO TO SERVE AS ITS SPECIAL AMBASSADOR ON NUTRITION, I HAVE VISITED A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT ON NUTRITION ADVOCACY MISSIONS WHERE I WITNESSED, WITH MUCH SATISFACTION, THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES AIMED AT REVERSING FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION. I WAS ALSO GREATLY ENCOURAGED TO SEE THAT THE F.A.O. AND OTHER U.N. AGENCIES, HAVE FORGED



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STRONG AND CONSTRUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENTS AND VARIOUS CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION TO PROMOTE AND IMPLEMENT NUTRITION SENSITIVE AGRICULTURE IN MANY COUNTRIES ACROSS THE CONTINENT.

HOWEVER, I DO FEEL OBLIGED TO NOTE, OR EVEN SOUND A WORD OF WARNING, THAT WHILE OUR ATTENTION HAS REMAINED FOCUSED ON ADDRESSING MALNUTRITION AND ITS RELATED SYMPTOMS OF STUNTING, WASTING AND MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCY, A NEW SITUATION IS NOW DEVELOPING, WITH OBESITY EMERGING AS A NEW FOOTPRINT IN THE NUTRITION LANDSCAPE. IT IS REPORTED THAT BETWEEN 2012 AND 2016, THE NUMBER OF ADULTS ABOVE 18 YEARS OF AGE WHO WERE OBESE INCREASED FROM 59 MILLION TO 73.5 MILLION IN THE SUB-SAHARAN COUNTRIES. AS WE KNOW OBESITY CARRIES WITH IT A HIGH RISK FACTOR FOR MANY TYPES OF NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES (NCD's) SUCH AS DIABETES, HEART DISEASE AND STROKE. IN ADDITION, A RECENT ANALYSIS THAT INCLUDED SEVERAL AFRICAN COUNTRIES, SHOWED THAT THE DIRECT HEALTHCARE COST OF DIABETES, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS ESTIMATED AS BETWEEN 3.5 AND 4.5 BILLION U.S. DOLLARS PER ANNUM. IT IS CLEAR, THEREFORE, THAT THE ECONOMIC BURDEN FROM NCD's HAS HUGE CONSEQUENCES FOR NATIONAL BUDGETS IN AFRICA. THESE ALARMING FACTS UNDERSCORE THE NECESSITY FOR



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ALL OF US TO TAKE URGENT ACTION TO REVERSE THIS DIRE SITUATION.

RAPID URBANISATION ACCOMPANIED BY A DIETARY TRANSITION FROM SLOW HOME-COOKED MEALS TO FAST FOODS THAT ARE ENERGY DENSE AND NUTRIENT POOR IS REPORTED TO BE DRIVING THE OBESITY PROBLEM. THE MIDDLE INCOME WORKING FAMILIES ARE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE CONSUMPTION OF READY MADE FOODS THAT ARE LOW IN NUTRITION VALUE. THE RURAL DIETS ARE ALSO GRADUALLY SHIFTING AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL HEALTHY AND ORGANIC FOODS TO THOSE THAT ARE MORE COMMON IN THE URBAN CENTRES.

THIS ALARMING ACCELERATION OF OBESITY CLEARLY SHOWS THAT A WHOLE OF SOCIETY EFFORT IS REQUIRED TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEM, IN A SIMILAR MANNER AS WAS DONE WITH THE PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES OF HIV/AIDS AND MALARIA. LET ME QUOTE ANOTHER STATISTIC TO ILLUSTRATE THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM; ONE W.H.O REPORT OF 2016 ESTIMATED THAT IN THE LAST 40 YEARS THE NUMBER OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH OBESITY HAS RISEN MORE THAN TEN-FOLD FROM 11 MILLION TO 124 MILLION. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT WE MUST ENSURE THAT PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY



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DIETS IF WE ARE TO SUCCESSFULLY ADDRESS THE OBESITY PROBLEM.

**YOUR MAJESTY,
HONOURABLE MINISTERS;
DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.**

URGENT AND RENEWED POLICY COMMITMENTS ARE NEEDED TO CHANGE THE FOOD ENVIRONMENT IN ORDER TO DELIVER HEALTHY DIETS. LABELLING OF OUR FOODS SHOULD BE ELABORATE AND COHERENT. TRADING POLICIES SHOULD BE ROBUST AND MARKETING PRACTICES SHOULD BE REGULATED TOWARDS PROMOTING FOOD SAFETY. OBESITY SHOULD BE TARGETED BY POLICIES DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE OBESITY REDUCTION. EDUCATION ON NUTRITIOUS FOODS AND GOOD EATING HABITS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED, ESPECIALLY AMONG CHILDREN.

FAILURE TO TAKE ACTION NOW TO REVERSE THIS PLAGUE WILL SEE A CONTINUED PATTERN IN PREMATURE DEATHS AND MORBIDITY PATTERNS ASSOCIATED WITH OBESITY. WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT WE LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND AND TAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO ADDRESS OBESITY AND REVERSE THE HARM THAT IT POSES TO OUR SOCIETY, IN PARTICULAR, TO OUR FUTURE GENERATION. IF NO URGENT ACTION IS TAKEN, THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND TARGETS WE HAVE SET



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FOR OURSELVES, AT REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS, UNDER THE MALABO DECLARATION AND AGENDA 2063 AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, WILL REMAIN ILLUSIVE.

AS THE FAO SPECIAL AMBASSADOR ON NUTRITION, I KNOW THAT I COULD NOT MAKE MY CALL TO ACTION ON A MORE APPORTUNE DAY AND AT A MORE APPROPRIATE PLACE THAN TODAY DURING THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD FOOD DAY AND HERE AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF FAO. LET US CONTINUE TO FIGHT, WITH VIGOUR AND URGENCY, MALNUTRITION IN ALL ITS FORMS, BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT STUNTING, WASTING AND MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES HAVE HAD A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COUNTRIES. I WOULD STILL LIKE TO URGE ALL GOVERNMENTS AND POLICY MAKERS TO MAKE STRONG INTERVENTIONS THAT WILL FACILITATE SUSTAINED ALLOCATIONS OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES SO THAT WE CAN REALISE MEANINGFUL AND IRRIVERSIBLE GAINS IN THIS WAR AGAINST MALNUTRITION.

SIMILARLY, I AM ASKING FOR IMMEDIATE AND URGENT ACTION AGAINST OBESITY, BECAUSE FAILURE TO DO SO WILL BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANKIND. OUR INTERVENTIONS SHOULD BE COMPREHENSIVE AND INCLUSIVE, BRINGING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, CIVIL SOCIETY AND ALL THE RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS. I BELIEVE THAT IT IS ONLY THROUGH A COMPREHENSIVE AND



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COLLABORATIVE APPROACH, INVOLVING ALL STAKEHOLDERS, AND ONE THAT PRIORITISES THE INTERESTS OF THE WHOLE SOCIETY, THAT WE CAN EMERGE VICTORIOUS IN THIS STRUGGLE TO END OBESITY AND MALNUTRITION IN GENERAL.

**YOUR MAJESTY,
EXCELLENCIES,
DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

IN CONCLUDING MY REMARKS, ALLOW ME TO REGISTER MY PROFOUND GRATITUDE FOR THE OPPORTUNITY I HAVE BEEN AFFORDED TO ADDRESS THIS DISTINGUISHED GATHERING ON THE CRITICAL SUBJECT OF MALNUTRITION AND, IN PARTICULAR, TO HIGHLIGHT THE CHALLENGES THAT ARE BROUGHT ABOUT BY OBESITY. IT IS MY FERVENT HOPE THAT HAVING BEEN MOTIVATED AND INSPIRED BY THE DELIBERATIONS OF THIS GATHERING, WE WILL GO BACK TO OUR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS AND INCREASE OUR EFFORTS TOWARDS DEVISING STRATEGIES AND POLICIES THAT CAN BRING A HALT TO THESE WORRYING TRENDS – STRATEGIES AND POLICIES THAT WILL ENSURE THAT A ZERO HUNGER WORLD BY 2030 IS POSSIBLE!.

I THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION.