



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

ADDRESS TO THE NATION

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY DR. MOKGWEETSI E. K. MASISI
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA**

9th JULY 2020

1. **Fellow citizens**, the Coronavirus pandemic is far from over as evidenced by the rising number of infections and fatalities across the globe, in Sub Saharan Africa, neighbouring countries and Botswana. Consequently, its impact on our economies is devastating.
2. In the case of Botswana, it has adversely affected economic activities in the tourism, mining, manufacturing and services industries which are the mainstay of our economy. Therefore, as a nation we have to ensure that we continue to wage a spirited fight against the spread and transmission of COVID-19. We can only achieve that by adhering at all times, to the health protocols of extreme social distancing, regular washing of hands with clean water and soap and the use of hand sanitizers as well as proper wearing of face masks.
3. **Bagaetsho**, it is at a time like this when we seem to be getting sapped of energy against this very dangerous enemy we are up against, that we must draw upon our inspirational past against similar challenges to fight on. We managed to reverse the negative gains that HIV/AIDS had made against us in the 90s and early 2000s, and; we survived a number of devastating droughts over the decades, amongst others.

4. We achieved all these because we stood united as a nation and never let our guard down. The COVID-19 pandemic calls for exactly the same approach and resilient mentality. We are a strong people. That is why I get concerned when I receive reports that despite all of us having worked hard to keep COVID-19 at bay, we are now becoming complacent. We must not relax against this invisible but defeatable enemy whose risk is increasing as evidenced by the exponential rise in COVID-19 cases in the region and other parts of the world.
5. **My Fellow citizens,** we must go back to our higher level of responsibility for which we are known as Batswana. Let us not be tired of adhering to COVID-19 health protocols. These protocols have proven to be effective in the absence of a cure. Adopting behaviours that protect us against COVID-19 include avoiding crowded spaces, wearing masks, using sanitizers, washing hands with water and soap, not travelling or attending events unless it is absolutely necessary. If you have to go out, please practice COVID-19 preventative behaviours.
6. **Bagaetsho,** COVID-19 has disrupted our way of life such as the slow supply of goods to our retail and industrial sectors. This is mainly attributed to the reduced production capacity in factories

where these goods are manufactured, particularly outside Botswana.

7. As you may be aware, Botswana as a small and landlocked country imports most of her goods and services through the Republic of South Africa. However, in the recent past, things have changed dramatically due to the advent of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns in South Africa, which in turn significantly affected our own economy.
8. A case in point is the fuel shortage that we have been experiencing across the country in the last two weeks, particularly in the Greater Gaborone and Greater Francistown areas. Approximately 90% of fuel consumed in Botswana is sourced from the Republic of South Africa and the balance comes through Mozambique and Namibia. This is the subject on which I want to speak to you about tonight. Our current fuel shortage is attributed to the following factors;
 - South Africa went into a lockdown and when it was lifted, there was a surge in demand for both diesel and petrol putting a strain on their ability to supply.
 - Most of the local oil companies are getting their agreed allocations, and they are unable to get anything more than the

agreed allocation. The situation is so serious that in some instances, oil marketers are limited to two trucks per day.

- This has translated into rationing as South Africa is also not meeting her local demand.
- It has not been easy to ramp-up supply to make up for the shortfall both in South African and here at home.
- The breakdown of inland refineries in South Africa which has also led to the rationing of fuel to our local supply market.
- Locally, one of our challenges has been that during the lockdown, fuel stock levels of Oil companies were very low because there was very little activity due to the movement restrictions and as such they did not replenish their stocks on time.
- The strike action by truck drivers in South Africa, which occurred on 7th July, 2020 has also had an impact on our supply and will continue to do so as long as the strike continues. I wish to emphasise that contrary to what some people here at home are peddling, the truckers' strike action in South Africa is not directed at Botswana truck drivers exclusively, nor is it a reaction to anything happening in Botswana. However, we

acknowledge it will impact on our supply chain processes. Nevertheless, I have full confidence in the ability of all concerned parties to resolve this matter.

- Be also assured that respective Ministers and officials are continuously engaging their counterparts in South Africa to find lasting solutions to these challenges. The private sector here is also on board and in discussions with Government to mitigate and find lasting solutions to this problem.

9. **Bagaetsho,** we equally depend on rail transport for our fuel supply and Botswana Railways which has the capacity to move large amounts of fuel to meet the market demand has its own challenges. This supply route has not been used optimally because of the high logistics costs involved. In addition, even if we opted to rely more on Botswana Railways to deliver our fuel, at the moment we would still not get enough as a result of the rationing at the sources which I have already mentioned. Furthermore, the most direct route for rail from Krugersdorp to Mahikeng is currently closed due to maintenance works.

10. To address the fuel shortages, Government has come up with the following, short and long term solutions;

- We have tapped into the strategic fuel reserves which normally cover 12 days. At the moment, we are sitting at 8 days cover and we cannot go below five (5) days cover.
- Government is actively looking for additional importation routes particularly in Namibia and Mozambique to help meet our local demand for fuel. Botswana Oil is currently sourcing fuel through Namibia and Mozambique and negotiations with importers are at an advanced stage.
- In addition, Government has decided on the following measures which shall effect immediately until the situation normalises;
- To review fuel stations' operating hours and ration the sale of fuel as follows:
 - Each car will fuel at a maximum cost of Two Hundred and Fifty Pula (P250) only;
 - Purchase of fuel with jerry cans will be restricted to Thursdays only;

- There will be no purchasing of petrol with drums or large containers.

11. If people do not comply with these regulations, Government will have no choice but to take further measures to bring about stability to the supply and demand of fuel.

12. However, these restrictions do not apply to emergency and public transport vehicles. I urge the public to give priority at filling stations to our frontline workers during this difficult time. The Minister of Minerals Resources, Green Technology and Energy Security Honourable Lefhoko Moagi and his officials will be available to provide further clarity on these issues.

13. **Bagaetsho**, I want to encourage all of you to use public transport and make use of the car pooling method, whenever possible, and to walk or cycle. Let us also be mindful of the speed at which we drive, which contributes to the high consumption of fuel. In this regard, Government may consider reducing the speed limit on our highways as a temporary measure until the situation normalises. Let us also cut down on unnecessary travel and plan each day's travel for efficiency.

14. **Batswana Betsho**, when I campaigned for elections, I made a commitment to grow the private sector and empower citizens and the time is now. We must strike a balance between maintaining healthy relations with our trading partners and empowering our citizens whilst growing our economy.
15. Batswana must be involved in the logistics and value chain of the fuel industry. As we do our best to resolve our current challenges of supply and respond to COVID 19 health protocols, which are most essential, we must have our citizens in the forefront. However, they must be prepared to take advantage of this opportunity.
16. Given our current experience, Government will fast track the completion of our inland fuel storage at Tshele Hills, the Francistown Expansion Project and the Ghanzi Depot. Once completed, these projects are expected to go a long way in addressing our fuel supply chain challenges.
17. **Fellow citizens**, as I move towards the end of my address, I wish to urge you to be considerate of one another especially as we go through these challenging times. None of us ever expected this pandemic to hit us. Last year almost to the day, I cautioned Batswana about the poison that hate and genocide may generate

into at the joint press conference addressed by His Excellency President Paul Kagame and myself as he concluded his first State Visit to Botswana. I want to repeat the same caution. Engage and debate issues in a civil manner rather than in an inflammatory way.

18. Today for the first time we are witnessing persons who in their pursuit of a Botswana they say they yearn for themselves and all others are dishing out unbridled promotion of hate and incitement directed at some race or nationality. That is not consistent with who we are as a people nor is it comforting to those who have legally and legitimately emigrated here for work, investment or pleasure.
19. They are clearly working on an agenda to make Botswana an unwelcoming and uncomfortable place in the mistaken belief that opportunities for jobs would come. Botswana must condemn these sentiments for differences even of political persuasion can be expressed freely as it is promoted and protected, but under no circumstances will it be tolerable for hate speech to be the new code for political or any other freedom of expression.
20. I call on all who have been abusing others who may happen to have committed the only "crime" of looking and being different

from them, to stop such abuse whether it is through social media, print or otherwise. Let me reassure all Batswana irrespective of what they may look or feel like and residents and visitors that you are and will remain safe and protected in the Republic of Botswana.

21. As Government, we are alive to the fact that citizens have every right to demand to be served diligently and efficiently. I want to assure you that my Government will ensure that your right to be heard will be defended and respected, but that right comes with responsibility and respect for other people's rights. For you don't tomorrow it will be you who will be different. I remain optimistic that the lessons we are learning from COVID-19 will propel us to serve you better, going forward.

22. As your President and one of your own, I know that this pandemic has caused instability to our lives and the economy. Calls have been made to open up all sectors of the economy. However, we must guard against the urge to open all areas of society simultaneously or quickly. A sensible and gradual approach to getting back to the new normal is required to enable us to exist safely with COVID-19 until a cure or a way to live with it safely is found.

23. **In conclusion,** I also wish to assure you that my Government will never abandon its responsibility to serve its citizens. In the next few days I will speak to you again as we launch the revised CEDA Guidelines. The guidelines provide favourable lending terms in terms of loan limits, interest rates, re-payments periods and relaxed security requirements which Batswana lamented over the years. The guidelines give special focus to manufacturing, mining, construction, energy, technology and innovation, agriculture, creative industry and tourism sectors without necessarily excluding others.

24. I am confident that these new guidelines respond to a lot of concerns that have been raised particularly by young people and entrepreneurs, women and the disabled.

25. We will also launch our Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan soon, to give us direction to resuscitate our economy post COVID-19. I also encourage the private sector to rise to the occasion and assist Government to get our economy back on the rails. This great nation was built on resilience and I am confident that if we stand together we will rise again.

26. I thank you for your attention.

PULA!