

## Empowering Girls: Celebrating 200 Years of Lesotho and Embracing Girls' Vision for the Future

Remarks by: Mr. James Nkemba Chifwelu | National Director

### Protocol:

Her Majesty, Queen 'Masenate Seeiso  
Honourable Minister of Training and Education Present here with us today  
The principal Chief  
The Member of Parliament  
Government officials present  
Distinguished Guests  
Children most Importantly, Girls of Lesotho,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, as we gather to commemorate the **International Day of the Girl Child**, we also mark a historic moment for our nation—**Lesotho's 200th anniversary**. This year's theme of "**Birth, Reflection, and Revival**" could not be more fitting for the work we are doing to empower and protect the young girls of Lesotho. Our nation's bicentennial provides an opportune moment to reflect on the past, assess the present, and envision the future; a future where the rights of girls are fully respected, protected, and enforced.

The **birth of Lesotho** was a symbol of unity, resilience, and strength. Now, 200 years later, we are called to **revive** that spirit by ensuring that girls are placed at the heart of our national progress. Girls have the potential to **drive the revival of our country**; as today's students, tomorrow's leaders, and the future pillars of our communities. When we empower girls, we breathe new life into our nation, creating a brighter and more prosperous Lesotho for all.

At **World Vision International Lesotho**, we are deeply committed to this vision of empowerment. In partnership with the **Government of Lesotho** and through the **generous support of the European Union**, we are taking action to ensure that **girls are safe, empowered, and able to realize their full potential** as to enable them to end up having a healthy, fruitful future and become productive citizens of Lesotho.

Two key initiatives stand as proof of this dedication:

1. **Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Project:**

Human trafficking remains one of the gravest threats to the well-being of girls in Lesotho. Through this project, we are raising awareness about trafficking, equipping communities with the knowledge and tools to **prevent trafficking** and protect girls from exploitation and advocating for the rights people with disabilities. We work closely with local stakeholders, law enforcement, and civil society to ensure that girls are no longer vulnerable to this heinous crime, but instead are seen as **leaders with boundless potential**.

2. **Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour Project:**

Child labour and forced labour are significant issues that disproportionately affect girls,

often forcing them to sacrifice their futures. Through this project, we are working to **strengthen legal frameworks**, raise awareness, and provide girls and their families with **alternative means of support**. By combating these harmful practices, we are paving the way for girls to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Yet, our efforts do not stop with addressing these immediate risks. We understand that **empowering girls** means ensuring their access to education, healthcare, and life skills training. In places like **Phamong Area Programme**, where girls face the harsh realities of **teenage pregnancy, child marriage, school dropouts, and substance abuse**, we are responding with comprehensive interventions.

**Let me take this opportunity to extend our sincere gratitude to Her Majesty, Queen Mme Masenate Mohato Seeiso for her dedication in supporting World Vision efforts aimed at improving the lives of the vulnerable children, their families and communities. A lot of milestones have been realised including but not limited to the following:**

- She supported WVIL to reach different sectors of the society with awareness raising and advocacy messages aimed at ensuring effective implementation of laws and policies, thus improve service delivery for children, families and communities in different sectors such as Livelihoods, Water Sanitation and Hygiene, Child Protection and Health among others.
- **Encouraging girls to stay in school** and pursue their education, which is a critical pathway to brighter futures.
- Planting of trees aimed at ensuring prevention, protection and mitigation of the effects of climate change and enhancing food security and contribute towards prevention of child hunger and malnutrition in the communities.
- **Partnering with 29 local clinics** and training **57 peer educators** to deliver **sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) life skills education**. Over **1,180 adolescent girls** are participating in these adolescent clubs, where they are learning how to make informed decisions and avoid risky behaviours.
- **Supporting over 2,000 girls** with hygiene packages, including sanitary pads, ensuring that they can attend school with dignity, even during menstruation.

We also continue to strengthen our **child protection efforts**. In collaboration with the **Ministry of Social Development (MOSD)** and **UNICEF**, we have launched the **National Reporting and Referral Pathways**, with **3,000 copies** already in circulation. This initiative ensures that girls know how to report cases of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and access justice swiftly.

As we celebrate **Lesotho's 200th year**, we must **reflect** on how far we have come in promoting girls' rights. This is a time to **revive** our commitment to a future where girls are free from fear, violence, and exploitation. The **Child Protection and Welfare Amendment Bill of 2023**, which calls for the criminalization of child marriages and child labour, is a vital step in this direction. We urge the **Government of Lesotho** to ensure its successful enactment. This bill will be a monumental safeguard, protecting the dreams and futures of our girls.

**Call to Action:**

To **all girls** in Lesotho, I say this: as we celebrate 200 years of our nation's birth, know that **you are the key to Lesotho's revival**. Your voice, your strength, and your dreams are what will lead us into the next chapter of our history. Your vision for the future is powerful, and it is one that we all must listen to and support. Let your vision guide us all toward a better tomorrow; whether it's demanding education, standing up against child marriage, or advocating for gender equality, and disability inclusion know that **World Vision stands with you** every step of the way.

To **families, and communities**, now is the time to invest in girls, to listen to their voices, and to take action. The **revival of our nation** depends on the empowerment of our girls; let us commit to **nurturing our girls**, providing them with the love, care, and opportunities they need to thrive. By investing in our girls, we are investing in the future of our communities and our nation.

To the **Government of Lesotho**, partners, and all stakeholders, our work is far from over. Let us push forward with urgency to **implement the Child Protection Bill** and eliminate all forms of exploitation. Together, we can create a future where every girl can achieve her dreams and contribute meaningfully to society.

As we look to the next 200 years of our nation, let us do so with the **empowerment of girls** at the forefront of our national agenda. When we stand with our girls, **we are not only shaping their futures, we are shaping the future of Lesotho itself**.

Let us all do our part to ensure it is bright and their vision for the future is realised. Let us build a Lesotho where the **rights of every girl are enforced, protected, and respected**; a Lesotho where **girls can thrive** and their vision for the future becomes a reality. Though, we are celebrating an international day of a girl child, it is also important to be intentional and address the needs of the boy child in order to enable them to be in the position to support the girls as they are both important to the society.

**Ke ea Leboha  
Khotso. Pula. Nala.**