

Advancing Justice for Children in Lesotho

Remarks by: Mr. James Nkamba Chifwelu | National Director

His Majesty King Letsie III

The Right Honorable, Prime Minister

Cabinet Ministers in Particular the Hon. Minister of Law and Justice

The Chief Justice, the Registrar of the High court, and other members of the Judiciary, the EU Ambassador, UNICEF Country Representative, the media houses here present. Distinguished guests, partners, community members, and children who inspire us to do this critical work. Good morning. Let me say all protocol observed.

It is an honour and privilege to stand before you today as we celebrate the inauguration of these newly renovated child-friendly courts. This moment signifies more than just an event; it is a milestone in our collective efforts to protect and uphold the rights of every child in Lesotho.

Allow me to first express our profound gratitude to the European Union for their generous funding, World Vision Ireland for their steadfast partnership, and UNICEF Lesotho for their collaboration and unwavering support. Your commitment has made the Citizen Voices Addressing Violence Against Children (CVAVAC) project a success. Special gratitude should also go to Judiciary for the support and dedication demonstrated in ensuring that the project is implemented effectively and successfully as to contribute towards improved service delivery in the justice sector in Lesotho.

The Importance of CVAVAC:

The CVAVAC project, launched in February 2022 and running until February 2025, is a testament to what can be achieved when communities, partners, and stakeholders come together for a common goal. This initiative has been implemented across 14 Area Programs in 7 districts of Lesotho, reaching even the most rural and hard-to-access areas. It was further extended to the Thaba-Tseka district, where the need for child protection is profound.

The CVAVAC project embodies our mission to empower communities to advocate for improvements in the justice sector, with a specific focus on child rights protection. By implementing World Vision's Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) model, we ensured that local, district, and national structures worked in unison to address violence against children.

Achievements of the Project:

Today, we celebrate the tangible impact of the CVAVAC project:

- **Child-Friendly Spaces:** Five children's courts, renovated and enhanced, now meet the highest standards of child-appropriate infrastructure. These courts provide a safe and welcoming environment for children navigating the justice system.

- **Innovations in Justice:** From video conferencing systems enabling privacy and accessibility to play therapy tools and furniture designed with children in mind, these courts are equipped to protect children's dignity and well-being.
- **Capacity Building:** Justice sector staff have been trained to effectively use these new systems and to approach cases involving children with sensitivity and care.

Highlighting Specific Contributions:

Let us briefly reflect on the transformations:

- **Maseru Children's Court** now boasts renovated park homes, access to the internet, and fully equipped play therapy tools.
- **Tsifa Li Mali Children's Court in Leribe** provides a warm, supportive environment where children can feel safe to share their experiences.
- **Berea Children's Court** has seen significant improvements, including electricity connection and enhanced visibility.
- **Mohale's Hoek and Thaba-Tseka courts**, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Government of Japan, now provide services that are both restorative and respectful of children's needs.

Impact on Children's Lives:

These changes are not just physical. They represent a commitment to ensuring that every child who enters these courts is met with compassion, respect, and support. These courts are a bridge to justice that safeguards their rights and preserves their dignity.

Looking Ahead:

As we inaugurate these child-friendly courts today, let us remember that this is only the beginning. The journey to eliminate violence against children and uphold their rights is long, but with projects like CVAVAC and continued funding from the European Union, we are making strides in the right direction.

We must continue to:

- Advocate for systemic change to sustain these improvements.
- Work together to protect children from harm and create a justice system that truly serves them.
- Empower communities to amplify their voices in the fight against violence.

Closing:

Today, we celebrate a shared vision brought to life. Let this moment inspire us to keep striving for a Lesotho where every child feels safe, valued, and heard. On behalf of World Vision Lesotho and World Vision Ireland, I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who made this possible. Together, we are creating a brighter, more just future for the children of Lesotho.

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

World Vision is a global Christian, relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to working with the most vulnerable children, families and communities to overcome poverty and experience the fullness of life. We help children of all backgrounds, even in the most dangerous places, inspired by our Christian faith.