

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting begins in Port-of-Spain on November 27 and continues for three days.

Fifty-one heads or their representatives will assemble at The Hyatt for the talks.

Two countries have been suspended - the Fiji Islands which was suspended from membership on September 21, 2009 and Nauru, which is in arrears.

We continue today a daily feature on the Commonwealth and will feature the Heads of these States who are expected in Port-of-Spain in November.

Bethuel Pakalitha Mosisili, 64, is the Prime Minister of Lesotho, assuming office on May 29, 1998. He is a member and leader of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy. As Prime Minister he is also the Minister of Defence. He is a former schoolteacher and lecturer in African languages in Lesotho, which has a population of 1.8 million. Lesotho also has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa.

Prime Minister Mosisili attended the University of Botswana and graduated with a BA, as well as a concurrent Certificate in Education, in 1970. He continued his education in the United States at the University of Wisconsin, completing a MA Degree in 1976. He later attended Simon Fraser University, in Canada where he earned a Master of Education (MEd) in 1982. He is married to Mathato Mosisili, they have had four children together. Their second son Maile Mosisili was killed by unknown assailants.

Prime Minister Mosisili spoke before the African Union Conference of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs where he made public his government's commitment to work towards a world which encourages equal rights for men and women. He expressed his desire to see an end to discrimination against women. He says he wants to see his country make available equal opportunities in both the public and the private sectors. He also made it clear that his country wants to do what it can to contribute to a world without poverty.

Lesotho, is a landlocked country and enclave — entirely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. Its size is just over 30,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Its capital is Maseru. It is the southernmost landlocked country in the world. It is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The name Lesotho translates roughly into “the land of the people who speak Sesotho.” About 40% of the population live below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 a day.

Lesotho covers 30,355 km<sup>2</sup> (11,720 sq mi). It is the only independent state in the world that lies entirely above 1,400 metres (4,593 ft) in elevation. Its lowest point of 1,400 metres (4,593 ft) is thus the highest in

the world. Over 80% of the country lies above 1,800 metres (5,906 ft). Lesotho is also landlocked and is entirely contained within the country of South Africa.

Snow is common in the highlands between May and September; the higher peaks can experience snowfalls year-round.

Lesotho's economy is based on diamonds exported all over the world and water sold to South Africa, manufacturing, agriculture, livestock, and to some extent the earnings of labourers employed in South Africa. Lesotho also exports wool, mohair, clothing, and footwear. One of Levi's jeans manufacturing facilities is located there. Also in Lesotho is one of Russell Athletic plants. The majority of households subsist on farming or migrant labor, primarily miners who remain in South Africa for three to nine months. The western lowlands form the main agricultural zone. Almost 50% of the population earns some income through crop cultivation or animal husbandry, with over half the country's income coming from the agricultural sector.

Water and diamonds are Lesotho's significant natural resources. It is utilised through the 21-year, multi-billion-dollar Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP), which began in 1986. The LHWP is designed to capture, store, and transfer water from the Orange River system to South Africa's Free State and greater Johannesburg area, which features a large concentration of South African industry, population, and agriculture. Completion of the first phase of the project has made Lesotho almost completely self-sufficient in the production of electricity and generated approximately \$24 million annually from the sale of electricity and water to South Africa. The World Bank, African Development Bank, European Investment Bank, and many other bilateral donors financed the project. Lesotho has taken advantage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to become the largest exporter of garments to the US from sub-Saharan Africa. Exports totaled over \$320 million in 2002. Employment reached over 50,000, marking the first time that manufacturing sector workers outnumbered government employees.

The official currency is the loti (plural: maloti), but can be used interchangeably with the South African rand. Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, and South Africa also form a common currency and exchange control area known as the Common Monetary Area (CMA). The loti is at par with the rand, while one hundred lisente equal one loti.

Lesotho is a member of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), in which tariffs have been eliminated on the trade of goods between other member countries Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland.

Lesotho has received economic aid from a variety of sources, including the United States, the World Bank, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and Germany.

The main language, Sesotho, is also the first official and administrative language, and it is what Basotho speak on an ordinary basis. English is the other official and administrative language.

The population of Lesotho is estimated to be around 90 percent Christian. Roman Catholics, the largest religious group, make up around 45 percent of the population. Evangelicals comprise 26 percent of the population, and Anglican and other Christian groups an additional 19 percent. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'i, and members of traditional indigenous religions comprise the remaining ten percent of the population.

An estimated 85 percent of the population 15 and over are literate, according to recent estimates. As such, Lesotho boasts one of the highest literacy rates in Africa. Contrary to most countries, in Lesotho female literacy (94.5%) is higher than male literacy. According to a study by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality in 2000, 37 percent of grade six pupils in Lesotho (average age 14 years) are at or above reading level 4, "Reading for Meaning". At this level of literacy, a pupil can read on or reads back in order to link and interpret information located in various parts of the text. Although education is not compulsory, the Government of Lesotho is incrementally implementing a programme for free primary education.

The Lesotho Government is a constitutional monarchy. Mosisili, is head of government and has executive authority.

The king serves a largely ceremonial function; he no longer possesses any executive authority and is prohibited from actively participating in political initiatives.

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