

## Advocating for Policies and Practices that Prioritize Education as a Fundamental Right and Catalyst for Positive Change in Lesotho

Remarks by: Mr. James Nkemba Chifwelu | National Director

### Protocol:

Her Majesty Queen ‘Masenate Mohato Seeiso

Honourable Ministers:

- Minister of Gender, Youth, and Social Development -Hon.Pitso Lesaoana
- Minister of Education & Training – Dr. Pitso Lesaoana

Principal Chief of Likila

Member of Parliament Qalo

Development Partners:

- UNICEF Lesotho
- American Embassy Lesotho
- CCL
- Schools
- Media House
- Likileng Community
- Children

Bo Mme le Bo Ntate

It is with profound honour and a deep sense of duty that I stand before you today on behalf of World Vision Lesotho, as we gather to commemorate the International Day of the African Child (DAC). Today, we echo the resounding call for action captured in the theme:

***"Education for All Children in Africa: The Time is Now."***

This theme resonates deeply with the urgent need for legislative action to dismantle the barriers hindering children in Lesotho and the rest of Africa from accessing quality education. The aspect of ‘education for all’ is paramount because, under Article 11(1) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, "*Every child shall have the right to an education.*" However, this fundamental right remains elusive for many African children due to various factors such as child poverty, gender-based discrimination and violence, crisis, disability, and displacement.

Teenage pregnancy and lack of access to sanitary pads are among the main reasons for the dropout of girls from schools, perpetuating gender parity. The prevalence of sexual exploitation

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and abuse of children, coupled with the lack of services for survivors, further exacerbates this issue.

Emergencies such as pandemics, natural disasters, and climate change, have led to a regression in realizing the right to education. Additionally, we must acknowledge the ongoing challenges of physical and economic barriers to accessing education, as well as the issues of educational quality and funding. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensuring that every child can benefit from a quality education.

As a nation, it is incumbent upon us to confront these obstacles head-on. Economic barriers, teenage pregnancy, cultural practices, substance abuse, and digital risks must be addressed through concerted efforts and legislative measures.

**Economic Barriers:** Many children complete primary education but are hindered from further studies due to economic constraints. The inability to afford school fees, uniforms, and learning materials perpetuates inequality.

**Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriages:** Teenage pregnancy and child marriages deprive adolescent girls of education. Legislative measures are needed to safeguard their right to education and well-being.

**Cultural Practices:** Some cultural traditions disrupt children's schooling, such as sending boys to initiation schools at a young age. Balancing tradition with progress is crucial to ensure education rights.

**Substance Abuse:** Youth substance abuse threatens education and future prospects. Education, prevention, rehabilitation, and legislative measures are essential to combat this crisis.

**Digital Risks:** The digital world poses risks like online exploitation and cyberbullying. Equipping children with digital safety knowledge and enacting laws to protect them are vital.

The pending Child Protection and Welfare Amendment Bill of 2023 and the Initiation Bill of 2021 represent crucial milestones in this journey towards safeguarding our children's rights and ensuring their access to quality education.

The Child Protection and Welfare Amendment Bill will serve as a fortification against early marriages and child labour, while the Initiation Bill will regulate initiation schools, safeguarding the rights of young boys and ensuring their uninterrupted access to formal education.

We call upon all stakeholders, including government officials, policymakers, and community leaders, to support the swift passage and implementation of these vital bills. Your commitment and collaboration are essential to creating a safer, more equitable environment for our children to thrive academically and personally.

World Vision Lesotho stands unwavering in its commitment to supporting the passage of these vital bills. Our collaborative efforts have yielded tangible results, from providing essential

resources to schools through our ECHO project, to empowering local actors through our Child Protection Programme, and equipping adolescents with digital safety skills.

**Education in Emergencies:** At Vuka Mosotho Primary School in the Leribe district, we have provided 100 desks and through the ECHO project mobilized resources for constructing latrines and classrooms.

**Child Protection Programs:** Our Child Protection Programme (CESP) has empowered local Child Protection actors to address root causes of child vulnerability. We have established 15 Community Council Child Protection Teams across our operational areas, reaching over 34,000 children and adults through sensitization on the negative impacts of violence.

**Digital Safety:** We have reached over 34,000 adolescents with education on digital safety, equipping them with skills to navigate online risks.

**Support to Law Enforcement:** Collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development has strengthened child protection procedures, including the design of essential forms for proper documentation and rehabilitation of child-friendly courts.

**Improving Child Health:** donated 300,000 tablets of mebendazole (deworming tablets) to the Ministry of Health which will cover 165,000 children towards improved health, increasing fostering long-term educational success

As we commemorate this day, let us not lose sight of the urgent call to action that reverberates throughout this country. The time for change is now. The future of our children hangs in the balance, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that every child in Lesotho and in Africa has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

Let us all lend our voices to this noble cause, stand in solidarity with our children, and champion their right to education. Your support and advocacy are crucial in making these legislative changes a reality and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

**Ke ea Leboha**

**Khotso. Pula. Nala**

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