

## Championing Children's Rights: Lesotho's Collaborative Fight Against Child Labour and Forced Labour

*Remarks by: Mr. James Nkemba Chifwelu | National Director*

### **Protocol:**

Hon. Minister of Labour and Employment  
Hon. Minister of Gender, Youth and Social Development  
Principal Chief  
Members of Parliament  
District Administrator  
Area Chiefs ( Berea, Maseru, Mafeteng, Mohale'shoek and Quthing )  
Excellencies Heads of Diplomatic Mission and International Organizations (EU, UNICEF, ILO)  
Senior Government Officials  
Non-Governmental Organizations  
Private Sector Organizations  
Young Advocates  
The Media

Bo 'Me le bo Ntate

As World Vision International Lesotho, our commitment to advocating for child well-being has been unwavering since 1987. For over three decades, we have stood at the forefront of efforts to improve the lives of Lesotho's children through our integrated programmes in Health, HIV and Nutrition, Advocacy, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, Livelihoods and Resilience, and Humanitarian Emergency Affairs. During our journey, we have witnessed first-hand the challenges faced by our communities, families, and most importantly, our children face, especially during times of crisis.

Today marks a pivotal moment in our commitment to the children of Lesotho. We stand here, united, on the height of change, a moment where our actions can shape the future of our children and our nation to launch the **Accelerating Action for Eliminating Child Labour and Forced Labour Project**, an initiative generously funded by the European Union and implemented in partnership with the Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Labour and Employment, and the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development. We are not just here to acknowledge the challenges of Child Labour and Forced Labour, but we are here to take meaningful action, this launch is a call to action to every one of us to shape the future of our children and by extension, our nation.

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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.

Through this transformative initiative, made possible through the generous support of the European Union, we aim to address the root causes of child labour and forced labour in Lesotho, while empowering communities and enforcing the laws that protect our children. The objectives of the project are **to raise awareness, strengthen reporting mechanisms for victims, and enhance law enforcement to combat these injustices.**

Child Labour knows no boundaries, it infiltrates our communities exploits our most vulnerable and strips children of their childhood, education, and dignity. Despite its beauty and resilience, Lesotho is not immune to this threat. **Child labour and Forced labour, sexual exploitation, and the trafficking** continue to plague our communities, fuelled by **poverty, lack of education, and social inequality.** According to the U.S. Department of labour, around 14% of Lesotho's youth are engaged in child labour, with many subjected to hazardous conditions that not only affect their physical and emotional well-being but also rob them of their right to education and a safe, nurturing environment.

Among the most prevalent forms of child labour in Lesotho are:

- Herding animals in often harsh and dangerous conditions,
- Domestic work, which may involve long hours with little to no rest,
- Street work such as vending, exposing children to various risks,
- Agricultural and mining labour, often under exploitative and unsafe conditions.

Even more alarming is the existence of the worst forms of child labour, such as:

- Sexual exploitation, where children are subjected to abuse,
- Illicit activities like theft, sometimes linked to human trafficking.

The fight against these grave injustices require a multifaceted approach, one that includes **awareness-raising, legal enforcement, and community empowerment.** The project aims to train **500 community leaders** to identify and report cases of child labour, reaching **6,000 community members** and referring **300 child labour victims** to social protection services. Through this work, we strive to empower local communities to become vigilant defenders of children's rights.

The role of media, cannot be overstated. Journalists and media outlets are critical allies in raising awareness, educating the public, and advocating for the protection of our children and prevention of all child labour. Their storytelling not only sheds the light on the complexities of child labour and forced labour, but also amplifies the voices of survivors, highlighting the urgency for change.

However, this is not a battle we can win alone. Collaboration is key. Partnerships with government ministries, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, faith leaders and international partners is crucial. Together, we must raise awareness, report cases, support child labour victims and advocate for the strict enforcement of child labour laws.

We must work hand in hand to create systems that not only prevent exploitation but also protect children holistically, ensuring that every child has access to the opportunities they deserve.

At the heart of this initiative lies the desire to protect children's rights and provide them with access to education, opportunities, and a brighter future. This project is a call to action for **all Basotho: to stand up, speak out, and act**. It is time for us, as a nation, to unite in safeguarding our most vulnerable and ensuring that no child is left behind.

Today, as we unite, let's reaffirm our commitment to the future of our nation, our children. Let's stand together to say, "No more will we turn a blind eye to the plight of our most vulnerable." Today is about ensuring that every child in Lesotho has access to quality education, no matter the challenges they face.

On behalf of World Vision, I am immensely grateful to all of you who have answered the call. Your presence here today speaks volumes about the strength of our community, and our collaborative resolve to overcome even the greatest of challenges. While our efforts today may not address every need immediately, they signify a crucial first step towards supporting this project and more importantly, protecting the children of Lesotho.

Let us commit ourselves today to this cause, knowing that **every step forward in protecting our children is a step toward a more just, equitable, and prosperous Lesotho**. We extend our deepest gratitude to the European Union for standing with us, championing the rights of children in Lesotho, and supporting our collective mission to build a future where every child is safe, protected, and given the opportunity to thrive.

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