

SPEECH BY THE SPEAKER OF THE BOTSWANA
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – THE HON. PATRICK BALOPI,
OFFICIALLY OPENING THE PUBLIC-PRIVATE POLICY
DIALOGUE CONFERENCE AT THE GICC IN GABORONE
ON 9th MAY, 2007.

Director of Ceremonies

The Host President of BOCCIM, Mr Iqbal Ibrahim

Chairman of Centre for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) Mr Gregory Leberdev

Honourable Ministers

Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions

Honourable Members of Parliament

Your Worship the Mayor of Gaborone

Presidents of Chambers of Commerce and Industry

Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to officiate at the opening of this historic Conference. May I first of all use this opportunity to welcome all our guests particularly those from abroad.

We wish you a pleasant and productive stay in Gaborone. My hope is that you will find time to visit other parts of Botswana if not immediately after this Conference, at least at a later date. I can assure you, that you will find such an undertaking very refreshing and fulfilling.

Chairperson, allow me to commend the organisers of this event for this progressive initiative. Our profound gratitude goes particularly to the Centre for International Private Sector Enterprise from the United States, which I am informed, initiated and is sponsoring the Conference.

Although fora for Public-Private Sector policy dialogues are a common occurrence in many parts of the world, in Africa, they are relatively new. Therefore, for this part of the world, this dialogue should provide opportunities to:

- (a) improve on local dialogues where they already exist or learn how to organise such dialogues where they do not exist;
- (b) at regional level, broaden the networks the region already has to include the United States of America, and;
- (c) provide an opportunity for benchmarking and establishing networks among the participating African countries.

Chairperson, Distinguished Participants,

This Conference could not have been held at a better time for this part of the world.

After many years of trial and error of economic and political policies largely crafted with little involvement of Africans themselves, many of our countries are in a hurry to make right what may have gone wrong with policies they implemented. It is clear that strategies on the way forward can no longer be determined by Governments alone. There is need to mobilise other public institutions such as Parliaments, the Civil Society and the Private Sector through fora such as this. Parliaments, in particular need to appreciate what it takes to cultivate an environment conducive to the development of a vibrant private sector.

This is particularly so in this part of the world where the private sector has in the past been associated with exploitative activities. Understandably, in many cases there is great public mistrust of the private sector.

It is still not uncommon in this part of the world to witness displays of hostility towards some private sector operators. It does not help therefore if Parliaments or their members display similar conduct. Conversely, Parliaments which are sensitive to the needs of the private sector can be a powerful vehicle for mobilising the public goodwill towards the private sector.

Chairperson, Distinguished Participants,

The involvement of Parliaments in Public-Private Sector Policy dialogue should not be an occasional

event which takes place at the pleasure of one party. It should be formalised and well structured to ensure that all parties concerned feel their contributions matter.

Among other things, there is need to ensure that all concerned have adequate access to information through regular briefs and in some cases participation in other appropriate fora. There is no reason for an example why Members of Parliament, should not participate in major multinational trade negotiations such as the World Trade Organisations (WTO) Negotiations.

I believe there would be no better way, of exposing Parliamentarians to best practices in handling the private sector as well as exposing them to the phenomena of competitiveness and globalisation.

Chairperson, Botswana has had the forum for Public-Private Sector Policy dialogue for a number of years now. Although we believe the role of the Parliament in the dialogue could have been better,

there is no doubt that a lot has been achieved in building consensus on economic and other issues between the Government, civil society and the private sector.

We believe this dialogue has served the country well thus far and we would therefore not hesitate in recommending similar initiatives to other countries.

In addition to this local initiative, Botswana participates on a regular basis in similar dialogues at a regional level. Botswana was the first country in the region to host the Southern African International Dialogue. Since then, many countries in the region

have done the same. There is reason to believe that such dialogues have contributed to an increase in foreign direct investment in the region, especially in the mining sector.

Botswana has also regularly participated in the Malaysia organised Langkawi Dialogue and similar dialogues elsewhere.

We also believe that regional dialogues have opened vast opportunities for cross-border investment. The region has recently seen the emergence of mega projects covering several countries in the areas of communications and energy and trade. Regional dialogues can rightly claim to have played a role in the development of regional regulatory framework meant to promote regional integration.

Finally Chairperson, Distinguished Participants, as I stated earlier, I believe this Conference represents an improvement over dialogues we have had before in two ways;

first because it provides for the participation of a key institution, that is the Parliament in the Public-Private Sector Policy Dialogue and;

secondly because it expands our region's contacts to include the United States of America.

My hope is that you distinguished delegates will use the opportunity this Conference offers to work out practical modalities for improving public-private sector policy dialogues in this region.

With these few words, it is now my singular honour and privilege to declare this historic Conference Officially open.

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