REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY TH E

SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING MR. WILFRED MANDLEBE

AT THE OCCASION MARKING THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE MILLENNIUM PROJECT REPORT

26TH JANUARY 2005 -UN CONFERENCE ROOM

Director of Ceremonies,

Your Excellency, UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Foerde

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Development Partners here present,

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Please allow me to start by inviting you to join me in observing a minute of silence in memory of the victims of the Asian Tsunami and in solidarity with their relatives and Governments.

[Minute of Silence]

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2. The outpouring of global generosity towards the victims of the Tsunami and the resilience shown by the affected peoples are perhaps the only high points in this massive tragedy. As nations and as individuals, rich and poor, shared in the grief of those directly affected, the best of humanity came to the fore and we saw in action "... a value set and doctrine that resonates across all cultures,,1, namely, respect for "... the dignity and worth of the human person" as envisaged in the United Nations Charter.

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[1] Peter Walker, Director, Feinstein International Famine Centre, Tufts University.

3. It is unfortunate that it took a tragedy as dramatic and as intense as the Asian Tsunami to jolt our collective conscience and enliven in us the principles of the Charter. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were founded on these principles and in response to an ongoing tragedy, which, though less dramatic and less intense than the Tsunami, is no less serious -the grinding poverty that is the daily experience of over one billion people around the world.

4. The Charter of the United Nations is ours, as is the 2015 Millennium Development Goals agenda. We, the peoples, through our respective leaders, signed the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and placed poverty reduction at the centre of global co-operation. The MDGs are our roadmap to the principles of the Charter and human freedom. We thus welcome the Millennium Project Report entitled; *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals.* It provides needed guidance on how humanity should work towards achieving the MDGs on time.

5. The Report does not upset or in anyway tread on the development priorities and processes of sovereign states. We are agreed that human deprivation is the

common enemy of human freedom. Whether the objective is peace and security in the prosperous West, or peace and security in poor Sub-Saharan Africa, or prosperity for all in Botswana, the attendant strategy would be defective without a determined focus on eliminating the dehumanising condition of poverty.

6. Significantly, and despite the persistence of poverty, the M DGs have inspired a new and pervasive optimism that poverty can finally be overcome. This optimism is a global phenomenon.

7. ladies and Gentlemen, it is my believe that this optimism is not misplaced. First, the MDG agenda is the most broadly supported global development programme ever. In an unprecedented demonstration of political commitment, the largest ever gathering of heads of states and governments signed the Millennium Declaration in 2000, committing their governments to do all they can to reduce poverty; improve health; and promote peace, human rights, and environmental sustainability. And global interest in the MDGs, from rich

and poor nations alike, has since proved substantially genuine.

8. Second, the MDGs have reduced the agenda for meeting the core challenge of overcoming poverty to a manageable set of high impact entry points over which consensus has been reached; These include:

- Education and health to expand and preserve human capabilities and expand human capital, productive capacity and competitiveness.
- Environmental sustainability to preserve natural capital and allow it to regenerate. Critical in this regard is the pursuit of an equitable balance in the way poor nations share in the development benefits of nature's resources and the costs of degrading them. At present, the balance favours the rich.
- Global cooperation to meet the resource gap in poor countries through aid; to create new opportunities through trade and investment; and to bridge the knowledge gap between rich and poor nations through cooperation in knowledge creation and transfer.

9. Finally, we firmly believe that poverty can be overcome because the world has the financial and knowledge resources necessary to meet the challenge of significantly reducing poverty by 2015. As the late Indian icon, Mahatma Gandhi, famously argued more than half a century ago:

"The earth has enough to meet everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed".

Director of Ceremonies,

Ten years to 2015, where do we stand?

10. We are now only ten (10) years away from 2015,
eleven (11) from 2016. How good are our prospects for achieving the MDGs and in the specific case of Botswana, the Vision 2016 objectives?

11. We know that most of Sub-Saharan Africa will not achieve the MDGs by 2015, in part because of persistent governance failures but also because of legitimate resource constraints, unfavourable trade relations and development shocks such as HIV/AIDS and natural disasters. But this much we know about Botswana:

Were it not for the extraordinary shock effect of HIV/AIDS, Botswana would be certain to meet almost all the

MDG targets. Our development strategies had until the mid 1990s, when HIV/AIDS began to take its toll on the country, put us in a position to achieve socio-economic development outcomes superior to the targets set forth in the 2015
agenda.

12. We have, however, made rapid progress against poverty, bringing it down from high extremes at independence to 59% in 1985/86, 47% in 1993/94 and 30% in 2003. This trend suggests that despite the HIV/AIDS epidemic, we are in fact still on course to meet the goals of halving poverty between 1990 and 2015.

13. Through deliberate and efficiently sequenced investment in the development of infrastructure and human resource capacity in education, we have achieved universal access to ten years of basic education. We, however, still have certain questions to ask ourselves. For instance, do we, or do we not, have pockets of exclusion or inequality in our education system that we should now pay more attention to? When the Millennium project observes that most poor children who attend primary education learn shockingly little, could this be true of our children too?

14. We have also achieved significant progress towards gender equality. We have progressively removed gender- based discrimination from our laws and policies. In our primary and secondary schools, full parity now exists between boys and girls. The trend towards gender equality is also reflected in the rapid growth in women's participation in leadership positions in government, business, politics and civil society. Were we to measure Botswana's rate of progress against a more objective criteria that gives adequate weight to equal opportunity, it would look even better. Of course, we still have a long way to go. Violence against women, for instance, requires urgent and forceful attention.

15. Our greatest challenge now is HIV/AIDS. It is the reason for the reversal in trends in infant and child mortality since the mid 1990s and is now the major cause of death in Botswana. Can we halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015 or 2016? This is possible if we keep-up the spirited fight against the epidemic to mitigate its impact.

16. Director of ceremonies, whereas figures are important to continually monitor trends of the epidemic, protracted debate about the rates would be counter-productive. I

believe that by now we are all convinced that HIV/AIDS is a real problem and its time to act collectively.

Critical Imperatives?

16. Ladies and Gentlemen, achieving these goals will require good planning, focus and determination.

The Millennium Project offers useful advice. We have, I am proud to say, already put in place some of the measures it proposes. For instance, we have a National Strategy for Poverty Reduction that is substantially MDG-compliant. We are also in the process of preparing a national poverty map. We will debate the other proposals with open minds and engage, to the extent necessary, our development partners in these processes.

17. I suppose that for now, it is essential that I point out that the Government has given statistical capacity building priority in National Development Plan 9 in recognition of the role statistical data and a smooth flow of information within government and between government and other economic agents would play in building momentum towards achieving the MDGs and Vision 2016.

18. I should also point out, that a sustained public sector reform process as pursued by Government promises to strengthen institutional capacity, improve institutional responsiveness, accessibility and accountability to the people. The Government recognises that without efficient governance systems, our development aspirations, whether we look at them through the MDGs or Vision 2016, will elude us forever.

19. On this note, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, allow me to declare the Millennium Project report officially launched in Botswana.