



CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT ON THE RETURN HOME OF OPPOSITION LEADERS

Following the public announcement to the effect of return home of Lesotho opposition leaders by the relevant authorities and indiscriminate reference to civil society involvement by various people in the media, civil society leading team dealing with reforms wishes to inform the public of developments in that regard inclusive of but not limited to the involvement of civil society in the return home of opposition leaders.

BACKGROUND

It shall be recalled that immediately when Opposition Leaders fled the country, civil society met them and later was able to meet the Rt Honourable The Prime Minister where the significance of resolving this situation was emphasised. Further, civil society in that meeting put it that it was willing to make a contribution in that initiative. It is a common cause that such initiative was undertaken by church, SADC and government and it has proven not to be an easy task. Civil society on the other hand has been actively mobilising the nation for reforms. In particular Development for Peace Education (DPE) went to the 80 constituencies to hear what reforms Basotho would like to see in the constitution and various aspects of Lesotho governance architecture while other non-state actors led reforms activities were led by organisations like Transformation Resource Centre (TRC), Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL), Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Department of Economic and Development Studies, Department of Law at the National University of Lesotho. Fascinated by the public interest and enthusiasm in reforms yet concerned about public inputs making it to the formal deliberations, these formations had several conceptualisation sessions which culminated in a consensus that there

must be a people's initiative articulating an ideal design of a process. In a civil society session co-hosted by DPE and LCN civil society organisations under the auspices of LCN developed a position calling for an inclusive, participatory and non-elitist reforms process. After robust internal engagements and final endorsement at the Annual General Meeting of LCN in 2016 and by the resolution of the same platform, the position was presented to the government, political parties and other sectors. In preparation for the deliberations on the position Opposition parties outside parliament submitted commentary but Opposition in parliament picked Section V of the civil society proposal of reforms design, which relates to conducive political environment for reforms and requested civil society to be involved in the efforts of safe return home of Lesotho Opposition Leaders who fled to South Africa.

SAFE RETURN HOME OF OPPOSITION LEADERS: Civil Society Involvement

The representatives of the Executive committees of the three parties All Basotho Convention (ABC), Basotho National Party (BNP) and Reformed Congress of Lesotho(RCL) expressed a need for civil society to be part of efforts for the safe return home of leaders. Reference was made to the Section V of Civil Society proposal on reforms process. Civil society approach was for the parties to define *safe return home of leaders*. Through several meetings between civil society core team and the executives at home and those which involved leaders in the Free state such definition was made and the process culminated with the document: *the safe return home of opposition leaders: civil society proposal on Inclusive Reforms' Design*. On the basis of this document civil society sought audience of SADC Facilitator, the Government of Lesotho, and SADC Oversight Committee and did internal consultations with the church, college of chiefs and other sectors. In this regard, civil society has:

1. Done internal consultations with the church and college of chiefs and there is a consensus that collective efforts should be made for leaders to come back home and play their role;
2. Written a letter of request to meet The Right Honourable The Prime Minister and made several telephonic follow up conversations with the personnel of the Office of the Prime Minister. Though meeting has not materialised, civil society has hope that it will except that it would have been helpful if it came to fruition earlier;

3. Contacted the office of SADC Facilitator and used various avenues such as the office of Director of Organ on Defence, Politics and Security Cooperation, office of South Africa's High Commission in Lesotho and own means. What can be reported now is that the message has reached the Facilitator but no formal correspondence has been received. In the view of civil society, this communication has created awareness on issues Facilitator must know and there is a firm belief that it will not be ignored;
4. Met with SADC Oversight Committee and got impression that what leaders define as the safe return home could be discussed through SADC structures and processes.

Civil society believes that coming home of Opposition leaders is a welcome move and would in many respects help political situation improve in the country. Further civil society welcomes commitment by opposition leaders that their coming back is a peaceful initiative and they want to engage politically for the stability which plays a critical role in creating an investor friendly environment. However civil society is concerned by the slow pace at which government moves in engaging in this matter. Civil society would like to warn all those involved in reforms that political stability and consensus are critical for reforms. Once again civil society calls upon political leadership to consider a national dialogue not as an event but a process as a manner through which current political polarisation and the consequential instability, confrontation and antagonism could be averted. Civil society believes that engaging government on this safe return home of leaders will unlock barriers and pave way to broader engagement for stability and reforms.

From here civil society will continue to follow the Office of the Prime Minister and the Facilitator before and beyond Sunday.

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