

REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

**HONOURABLE EDWIN JENAMISO BATSHU**

**MINISTER OF NATIONALITY, IMMIGRATION AND GENDER AFFAIRS**

**BOTSWANA’S THIRD CYCLE**

**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

**29TH SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

**17 January 2018**

**Geneva, Switzerland**

**Mr. President,**

1. At the outset, allow me extend my deepest congratulations to you Mr. President, for assuming the Presidency of the Council during the 12th Cycle. My delegation wishes to express its support and assure you of its full cooperation as you will be discharging your onerous mandate.
2. It is my pleasure to present the Botswana statement on the Third Cycle Review Report of the Universal Peer Review (UPR).Allow me to place it on record that unlike in the previous cycles where Government initiated the Report and thereafter invited input from civil society, the compilation of the third Cycle Review Report was done from inception to conclusion in collaboration with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Botswana.
3. In this regard, the Government of Botswana would like to extend its deepest appreciation to all the CSOs under the coordination of the UPR NGO Working Group, for their critical role in the compilation of the National Report. We are mindful of the important role that Civil Society plays in ensuring that countries abide by their obligations under the various human rights treaties and in the overall development of the country. To this end the Government adopted an explicit NGO Policy in 2012 to facilitate regular interaction and meaningful consultation with civil society in matters of national interest including human rights. Furthermore the NGO Council was established in 2013 to coordinate civil society in this regard.
4. Together, we were able to identify key issues that affect the general populace and could impact upon the ability of all to enjoy equal human rights. These issues included: Combating HIV/AIDS; Gender Equality; Gender Based Violence; Disability Rights; Rights of Prisoners; Poverty Reduction; Sexual and Reproductive Rights; Cultural Rights; Children’s Rights; Corporal Punishment; Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity; as well as the Establishment of a National Human Rights Institution.
5. Although the Government may not be able to address all issues that were raised during the consultations due to capacity and budgetary constraints, we have now been sensitised on the different hurdles faced by our citizenry in the full enjoyment of some human rights and freedoms. As Member States render their recommendations, we shall endeavour to draw up National Action Plans, in collaboration with CSOs, to ensure their effective implementation.

**Mr. President,**

1. The UPR presents a good opportunity for us as a country to examine and reaffirm our collective values, efforts and aspirations in the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all peoples.
2. As reported in our submission, Botswana launched her national transformative agenda - Vision 2036 in September 2016. This afforded the country the opportunity to define its roadmap that will be instrumental in delivering our national aspirations for the next 20 years. The all-encompassing theme of “*Achieving Prosperity for All*”, will guide the country towards an inclusive development path to be achieved through the expansion of the domestic economy while empowering citizens to meaningfully participate in the development of Botswana.
3. At its core, the Vision recognises that our country’s outstanding economic, social, environmental and governance issues are interconnected, as defined by its four pillars of Sustainable Economic Development; Human and Social Development; Sustainable Environment; as well as Governance, Peace and Security.
4. Botswana also adopted the Eleventh National Development Plan (NDP 11) in December 2016 to guide the medium term economic development path for the country. The adoption of the plan is a first step towards the implementation of Vision 2036. The theme for NDP 11 is “*Inclusive Growth for the Realisation of Sustainable Employment Creation and Poverty Eradication*”.
5. The NDP 11 focuses on six broad-based national priorities of: Developing Diversified Sources of Economic Growth; Human Capital Development; Social Development; Sustainable Use of Natural Resources; Consolidation of Good Governance and Strengthening of National Security; and Implementation of Effective Monitoring and Evaluation Systems. Needless to say, these policies, priorities and themes are aimed at the promotion and protection of human rights in their broad sense.

**Mr. President,**

1. In 2014, Cabinet approved the amendment of the Ombudsman Act [CAP 02:12], Act No. 5 of 1995 to confer a human rights mandate on the Office of the Ombudsman. I have received the assurance that the drafting of the Ombudsman Amendment Bill is at an advanced stage, and will be tabled during the 2018 July Session of Parliament.
2. In addition, Government decided to establish a Human Rights Unit within the Office of the President to put further emphasis on the promotion and protection of human rights at the highest level. The Unit will further coordinate the development of a National Human Rights Strategy and National Action Plan on Human Rights, and ensure that all stakeholders play their part in the implementation of accepted recommendations from the various Treaty bodies, including the UPR.
3. I am pleased to inform you that the recruitment process for the Unit has begun in earnest and it is our ardent hope that this Unit, once operational, will contribute to ensuring that our reporting obligations under the various treaties are adhered to. Provision will be made in the national budget to fund the new structures that will be established as a result. In that regard, let me take this opportunity to sincerely thank the United Nations for providing technical support to Botswana to enable submission of some of her outstanding reports..
4. In 2017, we were able to submit National Reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Committee on the Elimination on all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), while work has started on the initial report on the Convention Against Torture. Government has also decided to use the Simplified Reporting Procedure to submit her pending periodic reports on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). We await the different Committees to furnish us with the list of issues to be responded to.
5. With respect to domestication and implementation initiatives, I am pleased to inform you that Parliament passed “The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court Act of 2017” on 13th July 2017. The domestication of the Rome Statute is an indication of our commitment at the national level to hold those responsible for crimes against humanity, human rights violations, and other serious crimes defined in the Statute to account for their deeds.
6. Our unwavering belief in the spirit that inspired the creation of the ICC led Botswana to co-sponsor a “*Paper on the Activation of the International Criminal Court Jurisdiction over the Crime of Aggression”* in 2017 following the ratification of the Amendments to the Rome Statute in 2013.
7. We strongly believe that where national judicial processes are lacking or in adequately equipped to deliver justice and redress on behalf of victims of human rights abuses and mass atrocities, the complementary effect of the Statute should serve as a welcome alternative for the plight of victims.

**Mr. President,**

1. On the socio-economic side, the Government has put in place policies and programmes aimed at providing strong investment in social protection, health and education, resulting in extended services and accessibility for all. The Government continues to implement Poverty Eradication Initiatives whose main objectives are to economically empower the poor by capacitating the beneficiaries with skills and funds to enable them to live a dignified life.
2. In this regard, the adoption of these strategies and initiatives is aimed at addressing the needs of 6.4% of our total population that lives in abject poverty. These initiatives include Small and Medium Scale Enterprises and of the 51,794 people that have been assessed 28, 668 have, so far, benefitted.
3. It is also worth noting that through Vision 2036 and NDP 11 mentioned earlier, the Government continues to promote policies, and where necessary, develop new ones to stimulate the participation of Batswana in socio-economic activities aimed at eradicating poverty in all its forms. Furthermore social protection systems will also be strengthened through enhancement of policies and strategies aimed at cushioning vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

**Mr. President,**

1. Botswana has not recovered from the adverse effects of HIV/AIDS on development and the well-being of its citizens. We therefore, continue to take measures to combat this scourge and have identified prevention as the first priority of the national response. The National Strategic Framework (NSF) 2010-2016 was reviewed in 2014 to align the national response priority with the latest developments in HIV and AIDS.
2. In order to decrease the number of HIV related infections, deaths and treatments costs, Botswana launched the Treat All Strategy in 2016 whereby all HIV positive persons are put on treatment irrespective of a CD4 threshold. We also subscribe to the UNAIDS Global 90-90-90 Fast Track Targets and ending AIDS by 2030. The Government will continue to support HIV/AIDS interventions for the benefit of our population and epidemic control. They are open to all and are not used as means to negatively target or stigmatise any group.
3. We are pleased to report that the treatment programmes that we adopted continue to be amongst our global success stories. At the end of 2016, the Prevention of Mother-To-Child Transmission rate was at 1.4%, while to-date a total of **three hundred and eight thousand and sixty-seven** (308,067) individuals have been placed on HIV treatment since the inception of the National Anti-Retroviral (ARV) programme.
4. The country is about to embark on the Fifth Botswana AIDS Impact Survey which we expect to be completed by the middle of the 2018/19 Financial Year. Its aim is to update the existing HIV and AIDS data, and will be combined with a first ever TB prevalence survey for Botswana to inform the country on the current burden. As a country, we have invested a lot in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and we sincerely thank all stakeholders and partners who have assisted us.

**Mr. President,**

1. Health and wellness are an important aspect of human rights, henceaccess to quality health care services remain a priority for my Government. In this regard, we have developed a five year training strategy and annual training plans aimed at strengthening the capacity of our health care workers to address the problem of shortage of skilled health professionals and brain drain to countries offering better remuneration.
2. The approaches adopted in the provision of health care services have led to the improvement of access to health services by almost all. Currently, 84% of the population can now access basic health services within a 5km radius; there is notable reduction in Infant Mortality Rate from 76 per 1000 live births to 17 per 1000 live births; and a Reduction of Under-five Mortality Rate from 51 per 1000 live births to 28 per 1000 live births.
3. In order to improve the protection of the rights of people with mental illness, as well as access to mental health services, Government is reviewing the 1971 Mental Disorders Act. The burden of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases is significant and rising in Botswana. To combat this, Botswana recently completed the initial draft of the 2017-2022 NCD Strategy.

**Mr. President,**

1. Botswana is cognisant of the fact that much against our collective resolve as a nation, there are some segments of the population that are disadvantaged, marginalised and deserve targeted attention. The Government’s aim is to reach out to these communities through various schemes and initiatives to address their concerns and to allow the communities to actively participate and benefit in the development of the country’s economy as espoused by Vision 2036.
2. The Government has achieved significant progress in the areas of provision of shelter, tertiary education and economic empowerment initiatives, among others. Progress has also been made in the upliftment of the lives of our remote area communities under the Affirmative Action Framework for Remote Area Communities.
3. The Government is committed to the protection of vulnerable members of our society through the provision of social protection programmes. To this end, these programmes assist different categories of vulnerable people such as Destitute Persons, Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Community Home-Based Care Patients, World War II Veterans, Old Age Pensioners and People with Disabilities.
4. Consultations between the Communities and Government on issues and decisions affecting Remote Area Communities around the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) are in place and are continuing. These are at different levels; from the Game Reserve, District and at National level. These meetings are meant to resolve issues affecting them. A Consultative Committee comprising of CKGR Residents, representatives chosen by residents themselves, is in place to facilitate consultation with the Government.
5. Communities are also assisted by Non-Governmental Organisations such as Ditshwanelo (The Botswana Centre for Human Rights), Khwedom Council, First People of the Kalahari and other Human Rights activists. The Government of Botswana provides logistical support in terms of transportation, catering, lodging and conferencing. Financial support is also provided through payment of legal fees in formulation of Deeds of Trusts, workshops, training, resource inventory, among others, through the Community Based Natural Resource Management Program.
6. Furthermore, the Government has facilitated the drilling of six (6) boreholes for use by residents in the CKGR through the support of. Gem Diamonds Botswana; the company issued with a mining license to mine diamonds in the CKGR in partnership with VOX United; a non-profit making organization. Surveying for additional boreholes has been completed and plans are underway to drill these as soon as funds are available.
7. The Government further continues to provide water for the inhabitants of the CKGR, on a monthly basis, through bowsing into their 10,000 Litres storage water containers in the Game Reserve. A mobile clinic visits the Game Reserve every month to provide the residents with all their healthcare needs including nutritional supplementary feeding for children under the age of 5 years. The Government also distributes social protection food rations to the inhabitants of the Game Reserve on a monthly basis through the local District Council.
8. In order to enhance conservation, wildlife and management of the country’s other natural resources, hunting is illegal in Botswana except in private game farms. To sustain livelihoods, Remote Area Communities are allowed to gather wild fruits for consumption. A CKGR Community Trust will be established with Government assistance, and campsites developed at Mothomelo and Molapo settlements will be used for non-consumptive tourism by CKGR residents.

**Mr. President,**

1. Botswana continues to review and reform national laws to address discrimination of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the society. We are currently undertaking internal consultations with a view to accede to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a matter of urgency. A Revised National Policy on Care of People With Disabilities has been submitted to Parliament and is expected to be discussed during the July 2018 Session. The revised Policy emphasises the importance of implementing services through infusing the determinants of disability into sector mandates for ownership and full implementation.
2. The revision of the Policy is also intended to address other emerging and cross - cutting issues such as gender, HIV/AIDS as well as vulnerability of people with disability. During NDP 11, the Government will continue to implement the Disability Economic Empowerment Programme. The programme determines the extent to which people with disabilities are accessing economic empowerment programmes, as well as to develop strategies that promote the uptake.

**Mr. President,**

1. With regard to gender equality, the Constitution of Botswana recognises the equality of women and men before the law. Therefore, gender equality is a key principle that is reflected in national policies and planning frameworks and has, over the years, been increasingly accepted as an important development variable by various sectors of the economy.
2. The Government of Botswana is therefore fully convinced that promoting gender equality and harnessing the productive potential of women is the only option that can guarantee Botswana sustainable socio-economic development in the 21st century. To this end, Government has developed targeted support to women through programmes and policies that ensure and accelerate their sustainable participation in socio-economic, political and cultural development. The aim is to reverse imbalances created by previous policies and programmes which impacted negatively on women and hindered their effective participation in the economy.
3. In recognition of the various challenges faced by women, the National Policy on Gender and Development was adopted in 2015. The Policy guides and informs the development and implementation of gender- sensitive and responsive initiatives by all development sectors. The Policy further adopts gender mainstreaming as a core strategy for sustainable development.
4. To facilitate effective implementation and monitoring of the Policy, the National Gender Commission was established in 2016. To-date, the Commission has undertaken a benchmarking exercise to the Commission for Gender Equality in South Africa. In addition, they were capacitated on gender mainstreaming to equip them with skills to effectively deliver on their mandate.
5. Following the above, gender remains central to key instruments guiding development such as the National Vision 2036 which recognises gender equality as critical to socio-economic, political and cultural development; and the National Development Plan 11 which provides for gender mainstreaming and prevention and elimination of Gender Based Violence under the Governance, Safety and Security Thematic Area. In addition, gender issues were elevated to Ministry level through the creation of the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs in 2016. To facilitate efficient delivery of the National Gender Programme, the budget of the National Gender Machinery was increased from USD1.8 million to USD4.8 million in the financial year 2017/2018.
6. In order to promote gender equality and ensure effective participation of women and girls in development, Government continues to establish institutional, administrative and legal reforms. These include the Legal Aid Program, which assists indigent women to gain access to justice and legal services; the amendment to the Married Persons Property Act of 2014 which allows married couples to change their property regime; and the adoption of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act in 2014 which recognises human trafficking as an offence punishable by law. In addition, Botswana signed and ratified the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in 2017.
7. Botswana recognises that to attain gender parity, there is need to engage men and boys as strategic partners. To this end, the Men Sector continues to undertake various activities including community dialogues across the country where men and boys are capacitated on the positive role they can play in the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment. To strengthen this initiative, Botswana has been commemorating International Men’s Day since 2013, and in the following year, launched the HeforShe Campaign.
8. The Government recognises that economic empowerment remains central for women’s participation in various spheres including in leadership. To this end, Government introduced the Poverty Eradication Programme, of which over 80% beneficiaries are women. The Women’s Economic Empowerment Programme was also strengthened in the financial year 2017/2018 with a budget allocation of USD3 million.
9. Though Botswana has challenges regarding women’s equal representation in political leadership, the country currently leads the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region with 43% of women in Government Executive positions. Women also constitute over 60% of Magistrates in Botswana.
10. To promote girls’ access to education, Government introduced the re-integration of girls who dropped out of school as a result of pregnancy and other challenges. This has resulted to some extent in the increase of girls enrolling at tertiary level. According to Botswana’s gender Baseline Study of 2013; 52% of University of Botswana students were females, 68% at teachers’ training colleges and 58% at colleges of education. In 2017, the African Union conferred Botswana with an award for attaining gender parity in basic education.

**Mr. President,**

1. Despite the successes, Gender Based Violence (GBV) remains a challenge in the Country. To effectively address it, Government developed the National Strategy (2014-2020) towards ending GBV in Botswana. The Strategy adopts a multi-pronged and multi-sectoral approach.
2. In July 2017, the Government concluded the pilot of the GBV Referral System in the Northern and Southern parts of the country. The Pilot reached 2,700 community members with GBV messaging with over 200 service providers trained and 20 institutions sensitised on GBV. To-date, there is evidence of strong and cohesive network of service providers in both pilot areas and referrals are made on-line relieving victims the ordeal of having to repeat their story to every service provider.
3. To complement the above, the Government has since 2012 been engaging with Traditional Leaders (Dikgosi) on Mainstreaming Gender into the Customary Justice System. To date, Dikgosi have developed the National Action Plan on Mainstreaming Gender and addressing GBV within their communities.

**Mr. President,**

1. Botswana has taken a firm stance against transnational organised crimes such as human trafficking which we know has a seriously debilitating effect on its victims. The Anti-Human Trafficking Act commenced on 1st January 2015 and since then, Botswana has made great strides in preventing, suppressing and combating the crime. In this regard, we expect to officially launch and fully implement the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan in April 2018.
2. The Plan outlines planned activities and interventions that include multiple and key stakeholders who are central to combating the crime. The Plan has been estimated to cost an estimated equivalent of **Eleven million one hundred and eighteen thousand five hundred Dollars** (USD11 118 500.00) over an implementation period of 3 years.
3. Government has also developed a robust communication strategy to maximise the intended objectives as set out in the Plan. I want to emphasise that the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan takes cognisance of the **4P Paradigm** which serves as the fundamental international framework used by states worldwide in combating human trafficking, that is; **Prevention**, **Protection**, **Prosecution** and **Partnership**.

**Mr. President,**

1. As indicated in our National Report, Government has not been able to hold public debates with regard to the question of the death penalty since the last review cycle as envisaged. Botswana’s view on “the question of death penalty” remains unchanged, and the death penalty remains a competent sentence under the laws of Botswana.
2. In this regard, we hold the view that the death penalty is not a human rights violation, or a form of torture, but rather a matter of criminal justice. Like every country, we retain the sovereign right to independently decide our own criminal justice system, including the retention of the death penalty.
3. It is common knowledge that the death penalty is not outlawed in international law, save for children under the age of 18 and pregnant women, which we comply with. While we do not begrudge those who have abolished it or imposed a moratorium on executions, we equally expect that they too should respect our right to determine whether we abolish or retain it, as a criminal justice sanction, in accordance with Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
4. We are however aware, that there could be some genuine concern about the application of the death penalty in some parts of the world. In this instance, if anything, efforts could be directed at promoting and ensuring that all judicial safeguards relating to fair trial standards, contained in international human rights instruments, are fully observed and respected in proceedings relating to capital offenses.
5. Let me assure you that in Botswana, we have robust laws and institutions including an independent judiciary in order to ensure that there is no arbitrary imposition of the death sentence. Nonetheless, Government intends to hold public debates on the death penalty over the coming period, and Botswana would welcome technical and financial assistance to carry out such an exercise.

**Mr. President,**

1. Turning to the field of education, every child in Botswana is guaranteed the right to basic education under Section 9 of the Children’s Act. We have made good progress in the realisation of universal access to Primary Education, with 96% of children entering Primary School. We are now turning our focus on quality basic education and lifelong learning.
2. The introduction of Pre-Primary Education is part of a much larger education sector reform including the implementation of the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) (2015-2020) designed to transform the education sector. However, one of the major challenges is the provision of a learning environment that caters for students with varied potentials, interests, career inclinations and backgrounds as highlighted during consultations with CSOs, to include language of instruction such as Mother-tongue.
3. The Government also established the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology in October 2016 with the responsibility to facilitate human resource development and coordinate research, innovation, science and technology. This is done with a view to transform Botswana into a knowledge-based economy.

**Mr. President,**

1. During our interactions with CSOs, issues of land management and use as well as conflict between wildlife and people were raised. As Government, we acknowledge that human-wildlife conflict has escalated as a direct consequence of the good rains that were received in the past year. This has meant that wildlife migration has expanded into areas where they have not been seen in many years.
2. To mitigate human-wildlife conflict and to help drive animals such as elephants from community and farming areas, additional material resources, including aircraft and capture equipment, are being procured; in addition to other measures such as electrified fences. We wish to reassure all, that Botswana is committed to the sustainable management of natural resources supported by various laws and policies.
3. It will be recalled that the Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, Mr. **Léo** Heller visited Botswana in 2015 to examine the progress made and challenges faced in ensuring the full realisation of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation in the country. Botswana welcomed the concluding observations and recommendations contained in the report produced by the Special Rapporteur, and took the majority of them on board.
4. As a country, Botswana pursues a policy of cooperation with the UN human rights system, including its various mechanisms and Special Procedures. Let me hasten to add that Botswana has to-date acceded to all requests for visits by the Special Mandate Holders.
5. In this regard, we are open to receiving Special Procedures as and when requests are made. This approach allows the Government to ensure that when the Mandate holder visits, all arrangements are in place to ensure the successful execution of their mission.
6. Furthermore, Botswana has accepted the latest requests by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and the Special Rapporteur on Minority Rights issues to visit the country on dates to be mutually agreed.
7. As I stated earlier, Botswana has submitted the CRC and CEDAW reports in October 2017 and remains on course to make her submission on the pending Reports. Going forward, , the Human Rights Unit, which will complement the role of the existing structure of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Treaties, Protocols and Conventions, will develop a National Action Plan on Human Rights in order to ensure a more timely and coordinated response to our treaty obligations.
8. In order to achieve the long term goal of providing safe drinking water for our citizenry, the Government is implementing the Botswana Emergency Water Security and Efficiency Project, which will improve water availability and waste water management in 60 settlements. In addition, we are reviewing water sector policies and legislation; these include the revision of the 1968 Water Act and Borehole Act, the Development of the National Water Conservation and Demand Management Strategy and rolling out of the National Water Policy of 2016.
9. The Government’s commitment to the provision of proper sanitation services for all is reflected in the close to USD200 million that is being invested in the upgrading of sanitation capacity. We hope to have finalised a new National Waste Management Policy which will spell out the roles and responsibilities of different players in the waste water sector, while promoting value addition through its use.
10. The Government continues to recognise the importance of access to adequate and affordable housing as a basic need in the context of our implementation of the National Housing Policy’s Low-Income Housing Programme, as stated in the National UPR Report. The programme, which contains 3 components: Self Help Housing Agency (SHHA) Home Improvement; Turnkey Development Scheme and Integrated Poverty Alleviation; and Housing Scheme, has seen Government disbursing a total of USD22.8 million to fund 5,447 beneficiaries between 2008 and 2017.
11. In an attempt to provide shelter for the disadvantaged members of our communities, Government aims to have provided decent shelter to all deserving beneficiaries by the end of 2019. A target has been set to deliver 1,000 housing units annually, for both Rural Area Dwellers (RADs) and countrywide destitute housing.
12. As a commitment to our pledge, resources have been committed to construct 3,938 destitute houses since the 2009/10 financial year. The President launched a Housing Appeal for the needy in 2008. We are grateful for the support provided by individuals and the private sector to this Appeal for the needy. It has assisted greatly in providing shelter and dignity to the needy and so far, 781 homes have been completed.
13. In order to improve food security the Government continues to promote agricultural production through programmes such as the Integrated Support Programme for Arable Agriculture Development (ISPAAD) and the Livestock Management and Infrastructure Development (LIMID). The drive to commercialise and diversify our agriculture, is done through programmes such as the National Master Plan for Arable Agriculture and Dairy Development (NAMPAADD) which has resulted in increased farmers engaging in commercial agriculture.
14. With the return of relatively good rains in the last season, there has also been a significant increase in the uptake of the ISPAADD programme, with the number of participating farmers rising to 100,250 in 2016/17 financial year, and a noticeable increase in the total area planted, to 384,250 Hectares , which is 32% above the previous cropping season.
15. Despite the afore-mentioned successes, the country continues to face challenges such as unemployment especially among the youth, income inequality and a relatively undiversified economy. The country’s heavy reliance on diamond exports coupled with drops in revenue from non-mineral sectors, are expected to adversely impact on the level of the real GDP. In this regard, Botswana continues to carry out the requisite reforms which include introducing measures to strengthen the economy and even more importantly, diversifying it from over-reliance on the mining sector.
16. Without accelerated economic growth, it will remain difficult for Botswana to create jobs, especially those that contribute to increased productivity, poverty reduction and the attainment of equitable social development. The Government’s policy and planning frameworks clearly consider economic diversification as a crucial step towards promoting employment and economic development.
17. The country’s outstanding achievements and gains in socio-economic development have, however, over the last three decades, suffered a major setback due to the devastating human and social impact of HIV and AIDS pandemic. The direct costs of HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support are accompanied by an indirect loss to the economy especially in terms of professional, skilled and experienced human resources, thereby significantly reducing productivity and the rate of economic growth.
18. We thus continue to call for the assistance of our development partners to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights, development and fundamental freedoms in Botswana and globally.
19. Before I conclude **Mr President**, allow me to introduce my Delegation to this 3rd Cycle of the UPR. In addition to our Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva and her Staff, I have with me representatives from the key Ministries for Presidential Affairs, Governance and Public Administration, my own Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs; Defence, Justice and Security; Health and Wellness; International Affairs and Cooperation; and Local Government and Rural Development. Where appropriate, I shall invite them to provide responses to comments and questions that will be raised in their respective areas.

I thank you.

-END-