

Republic of Botswana

**REMARKS**

**BY**

**MS. MPHO MOGOBE**

**DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BOTSWANA TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN GENEVA**

**AT THE**

**INTERSESSIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF**

**THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC & POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY**

**31ST MAY, 2023**

 **SWITZERLAND**

• President of the Human Rights Council and Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Mr. Václav Bálek

• Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

• Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Nada Al-Nashif

• Excellencies,

• Distinguished Participants,

I wish you all a very good morning.

My delegation greatly appreciates the opportunity to speak today as a member of the core group on the occasion of the opening of the Intersessional Workshop on the Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Post-Pandemic Recovery.

The topic of this year’s deliberations is indeed highly relevant. As we are well aware, the threat to the right to participate in public affairs was all too real during the Covid-19 Pandemic as governments took measures to contain the spread of the disease and save lives. Some of these measures, included the curtailment of the movement of people, even to leave their homes to do the mundane things of daily life, let alone engage in public affairs.  They may not always have been well received by the public, and were sometimes challenged, but perhaps a point of agreement could be that they were adopted with good intentions in response to an unprecedented threat to public health.

As the world now emerges from the Covid-19 Pandemic, which on the 5th May 2023, the World Health Organization declared as no longer being a public health emergency of international concern, it is important for the citizenry to fully re-engage in public affairs in order to collectively as the global community and individually as nations, re-shape and restructure our world as necessitated by the new normal, post covid.

We believe that in order to attain universal health coverage as envisaged in SDG3 and ensure no one is left behind, lessons drawn from the Pandemic must be used to build robust global health architecture and health systems in all countries, as well as ensuring equitable access to, and distribution of, medicines.

**Mr.  President,**

The reality is that limitations to the right to participate in public affairs has far-reaching implications on democracy and the enjoyment of human rights as a whole, especially for groups in vulnerable situations who may need support in the exercise of their right to participate.

In addition, the impact of non-participation may increase vulnerability to poverty and threaten other fundamental human rights such as right to food, water and health, as well as prevent full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. Very often, when collective views and experiences are not incorporated in decision making, initiatives and strategies developed to address national challenges fail due to a lack of ownership by the intended beneficiaries.

Resolution 48/2 places emphasis on the obligation of States to take all appropriate measures to ensure that every citizen has an effective right to, and opportunity for, equal participation in public affairs, including participation in elections on an equal basis, which we believe is not mutually exclusive with participation in matters of public health.

**Mr. President,**

My delegation would, at this juncture, wish to speak a little about the issue in the context of democracy in Botswana.

The right to participate in public affairs is not a foreign concept but rather an intrinsic value system in our society, centered on the belief that everyone has a right to be heard.

As a result, the traditional consultative forum, the “Kgotla” which is the traditional equivalent of a modern parliament, with added capability to adjudicate minor criminal offences and family disputes, has since pre-independence in 1966, provided a forum where all Botswana citizens are consulted on matters of national concern. The Kgotla system has been maintained over the years, and serves as an advisory body to the Botswana parliament.

A unique blend of national principles, expressed in the national language constitute the elemental foundations of the process of consultation at the Kgotla.

Citizen participation in national discourse in Botswana is therefore a way of life and a cultural norm. Botswana’s commitment to continually strengthening democracy and a people-centered system of governance is a fundamental custom, executed through legislation and policies that ensure social inclusivity, that the will, the consent and full participation of the people of Botswana is always taken into account.

Botswana is committed to Democracy, Inclusive Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights. The country views these as essential pillars for strong institutions, as well as social and political stability. To consolidate these principles, Botswana implements long-term goals which include strengthening accountability, inclusivity, and transparency in her institutions, and respecting the rule of law and inclusive socio-economic development through administrative and legislative reforms.

**Mr. President,**

It is important to acknowledge that despite the modest achievements Botswana has made, there is still much that can be done to broaden the space for equal participation. For example, we recognize that this can be achieved if both women and men have equal opportunities across all spheres of human endeavour, particularly in leadership positions in politics.  In this regard, there are a number of initiatives including by the government, civil society organizations, to enhance women’s participation in public affairs. These include policies and programmes for the economic empowerment of women, and activities to empower women in politics, such as a Parliamentary Caucus for Women in Politics that operates across political party lines.

In conclusion, Botswana believes that the youth should be made a priority demographic in activating the right to participation in the post covid era. They should be involved as change-makers, knowledge holders and partners through participation in public affairs to ensure sustainable solutions for current and future generations.

I wish us all very fruitful discussions,

Thank you for your kind attention.