

Republic of Botswana - Office of the President

30/5/11

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR PRESIDENTIAL AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, MP FOR MOSHUPA AND ALSO PATRON OF THE ANTE TOBACCO NETWORK, HON. MOKGWEETSI E. K. MASISI, ON THE OCCASION OF THE ANTE TOBACCO NETWORK LAUNCH

MAY 30, 2011, THE PRESIDENT HOTEL

Director of Ceremonies

The WHO and UNICEF Country Representatives The Botswana Health Professions Council Members The Acting Director of Public Health Board Members of ATN and Chief Executive Officers of the Civil Societies The Private Sector here today, Senior Government officials, Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good evening. Let me first thank the Board members of the Anti-Tobacco Network or ATN in short, for nominating and naming me the Founding Patron of their Organisation. Having read the Constitution of ATN, and the criteria for becoming a member or supporter of ATN, I am deeply honoured to be one of the chosen few to mentor this organisation.

I would like to declare to this gathering that I am not in any way associated with the tobacco industry and that I fully support the intentions and objectives of the Anti Tobacco Network as outlined by the Secretary and spokesperson for the Anti-Tobacco Network, Mrs. Mbongwe.

The declaration I have just made is required from anyone who wishes to be a member of this organisation. It is therefore in order that I declare my interests from the outset.

2. I would also like to thank the ATN Board for organising this event on the eve of the World No Tobacco Day, which Botswana commemorates annually on the 31st May. This year's World No Tobacco Day theme focuses on the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control or the FCTC, which Botswana signed and ratified in 2003 and 2005 respectively.

One of the key objectives of the Anti-Tobacco Network is to help the Republic of Botswana comply with the requirements of the FCTC.

Launching ATN on the eve of this year's world No Tobacco Day is therefore not only strategic, but prudent as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. I am not here to narrate the health effects of tobacco or the details of what this year's World No Tobacco Day hopes to achieve. I will leave that to the Honorable Minister of Health who will address the nation tomorrow morning. My role tonight is to launch ATN and to inform you of its greatest wishes and how I hope to support it as its Founding Patron.

4. One of the issues raised by the Anti-Tobacco Network that compelled me to support this organisation is the fact that tobacco and poverty are closely interlinked. I am currently driving the poverty eradication initiative and it goes without saying that anything that contributes to poverty catches my attention. The effects of poverty are serious. Children who grow up in poverty suffer more frequently persistent and severe health problems than those who grow up under better financial circumstances.

5. The large tobacco companies earn billions of Pula annually. The big question is: "Who pays, and who benefits the most?" It is a sad reality that tobacco use tends to be higher amongst the poor. In the case of the poorest households, where a significant portion of income is spent on food, expenditure on tobacco can mean the difference between an adequate diet and malnutrition.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. The Anti Tobacco Network has clearly outlined its roadmap and priorities for the next five years in its launching brochure. I would briefly like to reiterate some of those intentions and reassure this gathering of my undivided support. First and foremost, ATN seeks the full implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) as well as adopting a comprehensive tobacco control legislation aligned to the provisions of the FCTC by 2012. Over and above this, ATN seeks the full enforcement of the Control of Smoking Act, which covers a ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. ATN's concerns are that even though Botswana has adopted legislation, limited as it may be, enforcement of it is lagging behind. I fully concur with ATN and hope the authorities responsible will take appropriate action.

7. With regard to tobacco advertising, there is a clear moral, ethical and legal mandate for Botswana to stop the tobacco companies from continuing to associate tobacco use, particularly smoking with positive images of health, sports, success, and romance. I am informed that despite this ban the tobacco industry has now engaged in other forms of advertising and promotion such as printing their tobacco product logos on clothing and even worse, school bags, making our children walking billboards. This should not be allowed to continue.

8. ATN further seeks the Government to raise tobacco prices and

tax. There is ample evidence that higher taxes are particularly effective in reducing smoking among vulnerable populations, such as youth, pregnant women, and low-income smokers. Tax money generated from tobacco products can be an appropriate source of revenue for innovative projects and activities to promote public health. The funds may also aid smoking cessation and as such aid patients suffering from non-communicable diseases resulting from tobacco use.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. ATN also seeks the regulation of the sale of tobacco products through licensing and prohibition of the sale of cigarettes individually or in small packets. I was listening to the Maokaneng program a week or two ago where the Anti Tobacco Network representatives were raising awareness on tobacco and poverty. Out of all the callers, those who were smokers expressed their wish to stop smoking. There is currently no health insurance coverage for tobacco users. The Anti Tobacco Network and I intend to launch a campaign to lobby insurance companies to develop programs aimed at assisting smokers who have an interest to quit.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. These are some of the current priorities for the organisation that I am about to launch. I am sure everyone here agrees that ATN is overdue. I therefore urge you to support and become members of the Anti-Tobacco Network. By becoming a member of ATN you are saying no to poverty, you are saying no to premature death, and you are saying yes to a prosperous Botswana.

11. Finally, as I officially declare the existence of the Anti Tobacco Network on the eve of the World No Tobacco Day, let me urge those who smoke or use tobacco, to think and decide tonight, to stop smoking tomorrow on the commemoration of the World No Tobacco Day. PULA!