KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS HONOUR THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR MAHALAPYE WEST, LT GEN MOMPATI SEBOGODI MERAFHE, NYB, MP AT THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON DOING BUSINESS MARCH, 28 2012

Director of Ceremonies,
My colleague, Honourable Dorcas Makgato-Malesu, Minister of Trade and Industry,
Honourable Ministers here present, Honourable Members of Parliament here present,
Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations here present,
Representatives of the World Bank Group, Representatives of the Regional Multi-disciplinary Centre for Excellence, Captains of the Industry, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Today (March the Twenty Eighth, the Year of Our Lord 2012) marks an important milestone in our continued efforts to promote regional economic integration. I am saying this, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, because we have come together as the two regional economic communities to deliberate on this very important subject of Doing Business as a regional bloc.

2. I must admit that the theme for this Conference: “Doing Business Reform in Africa: A Peer-to-Peer Learning Experience” is most appropriate looking at some of the challenges that we face as a business community. In essence, the theme for this Conference clearly sets the tone for a frank and open discussion on the elements that impede the ease of doing business within the region and efforts being made to remedy the situation. Against this backdrop, I have every reason to believe that this regional conference will help us to deliberate and find solutions to the challenges associated with the implementation of reform processes and the ease of doing business.

3. At this juncture, let me extend a special welcome to Honourable Ministers from the region and express my debt of gratitude to you, on behalf of the Government and the People of Botswana and indeed on my own behalf, for graciously accepting our invitation to this Conference.

4. Your Excellencies, you are warmly welcome to Botswana, Our Pride, Your Destination, and wish you a pleasant stay in your second home.

5. Let me also pay tribute to the World Bank for working closely with countries in the sub-region to ensure the success of this regional conference.

6. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I am informed that the main objective of this Conference is to share experiences and lessons on improving the business
environment in Eastern and Southern Africa. To this end, this regional conference could not have come at a more opportune time in view of our continued efforts to attract both foreign and cross border investments within Africa to improve the economic performance of our respective countries. To succeed, we need to refine our reform initiatives and create a conducive and competitive global business climate.

7. According to the World Bank’s Annual Doing Business reports, there is need to undertake certain reforms to improve our business environment. I must note that some countries like South Korea and Singapore who are at advanced stages in their reform processes can attest to the importance of having a monitoring framework. For your information, South Korean Customs Service’s improvement of cargo processing times is reported to have generated a benefit of Two Billion Dollars annually while Singapore’s switch to an online company registration is said to have saved the business community approximately Forty Two Million Dollars in 2010.

8. Distinguished delegates, as governments, we need to improve the business environment and strengthen dialogue with the private sector. At the heart of this resolution is the need to facilitate the creation of wealth and jobs by private enterprises through the market mechanism. Put differently, our efforts to create wealth will be in vain if we fail to create a conducive environment that allows entrepreneurs to thrive.

9. As governments, we can create that environment by developing regulations that do not stifle decision making by entrepreneurs. I therefore call upon our respective governments to make it possible for our citizens and indeed foreign and domestic investors to conduct business in our countries with ease. Most importantly, I urge all countries represented here today to promote openness and competitiveness.

10. You will agree with me that our major intervention should be in the form of promotion of policies that support innovation; job creation and increased productivity. Emerging economies like China and India have shown that countries can begin to grow by introducing reforms to simplify business start-up procedures and allow their citizens to exploit business opportunities in place.

11. Interestingly, we have amongst us distinguished delegates from Mauritius, South Africa and Rwanda, who have made significant strides in improving their rankings. We hope to draw lessons from their remarkable successes.

12. In Botswana, Government has identified the need to improve the climate for doing business as a priority initiative. In this regard, His Excellency, President Lt. General Seretse Khama Ian Khama has appointed a six-member committee of Cabinet Ministers, to guide the reform process. As a result, Botswana is ready to seize the opportunity presented by this Conference to learn from those countries which have successfully implemented the reforms.

13. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I am aware that many countries are at a critical stage that requires both the political will and decisive policy choices in the quest
to improve the business climate. In the same vein, I must caution that those economies which fail to make the policy adjustments necessary to enhance economic freedom and economic growth, risk long term stagnation or worse still, a return to the recession.

14. Distinguished delegates, at this juncture, I would like to advise our regional leadership to implement the reform agenda with speed, boldness and due diligence. This is simply because the consequences of inaction are too ghastly to contemplate for all of us especially job seekers and potential investors.

15. Before I conclude my remarks, Distinguished delegates, I wish to once again encourage you to have fruitful discussions and develop concrete ideas on improving our business climate. With those remarks, it is now my pleasure to declare the Regional Conference on Doing Business officially open. I thank you for the courtesy of your kind attention. PULA!