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**Opening Address delivered by H.E. Julius Tebello Metsing
the Principal Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of
Lesotho at the ECOSOCC Sensitization and Motivation
Campaign of the African Union
Lehakoe Club, Maseru
25 August 2014**

It gives me great pleasure to welcome the AU delegation and members of the Lesotho civil society community to this important gathering on the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC). Our country takes great pride in our membership of our continental organization, the African Union. We see great merit in fellowship and solidarity to promote integration and development in Africa.

I am happy to receive the AU delegation because their coming here is part of a process of implementing a decision taken at the 23rd Ordinary Session of the Executive Council and Assembly of the Union on preparations for elections into ECOSOCC. The Kingdom of Lesotho was a party to that decision in the same way that we were party to the Decision to create the African Union in 2002.

Our objective in creating the African Union was to accelerate the process of integration and to use the process to foster meaningful development for all African citizens on the continent and other parts of the world. We were conscious right from the beginning that development is a people-centered activity. It must involve all citizens in society. Thus the preamble and principles of the Constitutive Act of the Union was explicit that it would be a partnership between governments and all segments of African society.

Accordingly, the African Union took the unprecedented step of establishing a Department of the African Union Commission, which is the Secretariat of the Union, to cater solely for harnessing the inputs of non-state actors in the Affairs of the Union.

This is the Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate (CIDO) which is in charge of the sensitization process with which we are engaged today. Within the larger Union framework we also provided for the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) a civil society parliament elected by and led by civil society. CIDO serves as the Secretariat of ECOSOCC to ensure integration and harmonization of CSO activities within the Union framework.

The ECOSOCC of the African Union is a unique institution. It is an Organ comprising 150 members drawn from the African Civil Society community within the continent and the African Diaspora. Every civil society organization is eligible to apply and can obtain membership as long as they fulfill the criteria stipulated in the ECOSOCC Statutes. The criteria were drawn up through widespread consultation with civil society. Each Member State of the African Union is entitled to elect 2 members making a total of 108. It was originally 106 before the accession of South Sudan. Civil society organizations with a continental presence and mandate can have 5 members, including one per region. 10 sub-regional civil society organizations with an appropriate mandate and presence would be elected to represent wider sub-regional interests while the African Diaspora in various parts of the world would elect 20 members. The process of Diaspora representation is still being worked out. The Commission would also nominate 6 civil society organizations to represent special interests that may have been excluded in the process of elections.

There are two important unique features of the African Union ECOSOCC that marks it out from its counterparts in other international organizations including the United Nations. First as I indicated, it is elected by and led by civil society. Second, it takes part in the policy-decision making process and its leadership sits together with Ministers and Heads of States when they meet at the bi-annual African Union Summit. They participate in discussions and contribute directly to the policy decision-making process.

ECOSOCC has had two Assemblies since its inception in 2004.. The first was an Interim Assembly from 2004-2007 led by Prof. Wangari Maathai, our late and illustrious Nobel Laureate. She laid the foundations of the Organ and gave it credibility and status within the African Union family. Prof. Mathaai also led the process of free and fair elections that paved way for the establishment of the 1st ECOSOCC General Assembly from 2008-2012.

The Council and Assembly of the Union then tasked the AU Commission to organize elections into the 2nd General Assembly. The AU Commission reported back to the last AU Summit in Malabo in June/July 2014 that it was having some difficulty getting a

sufficient number of candidates for the elections across the different countries and regions in the Union.

The consequent Summit Decision (EX.CL/Dec.849(XXV) was that the Commission should organize a continent-wide sensitization and Motivation Campaign across Africa in Member States that did not have sufficient candidates for elections into ECOSOCC. The Summit set a deadline of three months for the completion of the sensitization exercise and directed that elections must be conducted into ECOSOCC before the end of the year 2014.

The process was initiated in early August 2014 and the exercise is being conducted here in Lesotho today. I wish to thank the AU Commission for its concern and efforts to ensure that Lesotho takes its rightful place among its peers in ECOSOCC within the African Union Community.

I wish also to implore and call upon the civil society community in Lesotho to do their duty and work with the Commission and the Government and people of Lesotho to ensure that we have legitimate and effective representation in ECOSOCC. The African Union team is here to explain the process. I call on all present here to listen closely, understand the process and take subsequent steps to register and participate appropriately. I also request that organizations present here should carry the message to those that are absent and also encourage them to participate and apply. Lesotho is too important to be left out of this vital process. This is an important component of the struggle for emancipation and self-realization in Africa. It is a process that obliges all segments of society to do its duty. The government and people of Lesotho are relying on our civil society to fulfill their obligation in regard of ECOSOCC. We want Lesotho civil society to go into ECOSOCC and be part of its leadership and to work closely with government and other AU institutions to ensure Africa's development.

Finally, I also invite the AU delegation to seize this opportunity to mix, mingle and interact productively with their brothers and sisters in Lesotho so that we can share concerns and cooperate fully on the road to Africa's integration and auto-centered development. You are invited to take enjoy all our amenities because they are also your own and to luxuriate in the hospitality of your larger family in Lesotho.. This is your "home away from home" and we are enchanted to have our kith and kin with us in this part of the motherland.

I thank you all.