

Annex 2

Arrival Statement by Dr Bakili Muluzi



Commonwealth Observer Group Lesotho Parliamentary Elections, 26 May 2012

ARRIVAL STATEMENT BY FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI DR BAKILI MULUZI, CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP

We are delighted to be here in Lesotho to observe the forthcoming National Assembly elections scheduled for 26 May 2012. I am honoured to have been requested by Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamlesh Sharma, to lead a team of distinguished Commonwealth citizens on this mission.

The presence of this Commonwealth Observer Group follows the invitation from the Government of Lesotho, and an Assessment Team which was here last month. The Assessment Team established that there was broad support for, and that conditions existed for, the presence of a Commonwealth Observer Group in the country to observe the elections.

The Commonwealth attaches great importance to the conduct of credible and peaceful elections as a means of giving citizens an opportunity to choose their leaders and to hold them accountable. We are here because we believe firmly that observing elections contributes to strengthening the democratic process. Our presence here is meant to promote and uphold that belief.

Observing elections is one of the many ways the Commonwealth works with member countries to deepen democracy. It complements other initiatives such as the establishment of a Commonwealth Electoral Network, which brings together members of election institutions to discuss and promote best practice, to share experiences and to create support mechanisms. The Independent Electoral Commission of Lesotho is a member of this network. The Commonwealth also organises workshops for governing and opposition political parties to enable them to discuss their roles, rights and responsibilities.

The Commonwealth has supported Lesotho through many of its previous elections and we are pleased to do so again as the country continues to consolidate its multiparty democracy.

The Observers come from across the Commonwealth and are supported by a staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat.

These elections are crucially important for the people of Lesotho as they elect their representatives; it is imperative that the electoral process is transparent, fair, violence-free and credible.

Our task is to observe and report on relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the elections and also on the environment in which the elections are held. The Group will consider all the factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole, and assess whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Lesotho has committed itself, with reference to its own election-related legislation as well as relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

We will consider, among other things, whether conditions exist for free and competitive elections; the Independent Electoral Commission is independent and effective; the voter register provides for universal suffrage; state institutions and public media are impartial; there is a level playing field in the campaign and that the campaign is free of violence; voters are free to express their will; and, the results process is transparent.

In conducting our duties and undertaking our assessment, we will be impartial, objective and independent. Commonwealth Observers are present here in their individual capacities as experienced Commonwealth citizens. We hope that our presence in Lesotho will help to further strengthen the democratic process in the country.

In the coming days, we will meet a wide range of stakeholders. We met the Independent Electoral Commission earlier today, and will also meet representatives of political parties, civil society, the police and media, as well as the diplomatic community. We will also meet with representatives of other observer groups, with which we will coordinate closely.

Prior to Election Day, Commonwealth teams will deploy to a variety of locations around the country to observe the voting, counting and results processes.

We appeal to all stakeholders to play their due role to ensure a credible and peaceful process, before, during and after elections. This is particularly important given the unfortunate events that transpired after the 2007 elections.

We hope that the IEC will continue to set the example by displaying integrity, impartiality and technical competence. We look to the political parties to respect the Electoral Code of Conduct, to focus on the issues and to reject violence. The media and civil society need to

be diligent custodians of democracy. And finally, we look to the people of Lesotho to show the way by participating in large numbers in the democratic process and choosing freely and fairly those who will govern them.

Maseru, Monday 21 May 2012

Note to Editors

For media enquiries, please contact Mr Julius Mucunguzi, Media Officer, at +266 57408412 or j.mucunguzi@commonwealth.int