

## CHAPTER 1

### **Political Background**

Modern party politics in Lesotho began in 1952 with the founding of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) by Dr Ntsu Mokhehle, its present leader. The Basotho National Party (BNP), headed by Chief Leabua Jonathan, was founded later in the same year and these two parties have, since then, dominated the political scene. Basutoland's first general election was held on 29 April 1965 when it attained full self-government. The BNP won the majority of seats in the new Legislative Assembly and Chief Jonathan became the country's first Prime Minister. Moshoeshoe II, Paramount Chief since 1960, became King. Following a constitutional conference in London in June 1966, Basutoland became independent as Lesotho on 4 October 1966.

Democratic rule in Lesotho was short-lived, lasting only for the life of that first Parliament. Chief Jonathan staged a coup in January 1970 when early results of the country's second general election showed the BCP winning. He declared a state of emergency, suspended the Constitution and arrested Dr Mokhehle and other leaders of the BCP. The election was annulled and the Assembly prorogued. Chief Jonathan ruled by decree until 1973 when an interim National Assembly was appointed to draw up a new Constitution. The state of emergency ended in July of that year.

Political instability and economic deterioration under Chief Jonathan's rule eventually led to a military coup in 1986. Troops of the Lesotho paramilitary force, led by Major-General Justin Lekhanya, deposed the Jonathan Government. The new regime established a Military Council, headed by General Lekhanya. The National Assembly was dissolved and executive and legislative powers vested in the King, acting on the advice of the Military Council.

In April 1988, five political parties appealed to the Commonwealth, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the South African Government for the restoration of civilian rule. In the following month Dr Mokhehle, after 14 years in exile, was allowed to return to Lesotho for peace talks, together with other members of the BCP. In early 1990, General Lekhanya promised that a return to civilian government would take place in 1992.

A few months later, a National Constituent Assembly made up of 108 appointed members was set up to draft a new Constitution. Between October 1990 and April 1991 the Assembly, which included members of the Military Council, Council of Ministers, all Principal Chiefs and politicians, including Dr

Mokhehle, held consultations using the 1966 independence Constitution as its starting point. In September 1991, the Assembly appointed a Constitutional Commission to assess public reactions to the document before it was adopted. The Commission received a substantial number of written submissions and held numerous well-attended public meetings throughout the country. The views expressed were taken into account in the final draft which was eventually published on 5 February 1993.

While the Assembly was still sitting in April 1991, General Lekhanya was deposed in a coup led by Colonel (later Major-General) Elias Phitsoane Ramaema, second in seniority to General Lekhanya in the Military Council. He pledged to carry through General Lekhanya's promise to hold a multi-party election by June 1992. In mid-May 1991 he announced the repeal of the 1986 law which had banned party political activity. At the same time, he promised that the Lesotho military would not contest the election and announced that foreign observers would be invited to monitor the election process.

### **Return of HM Moshoeshoe II**

A factor impacting on the political environment in Lesotho was the exile to London in March 1990 of HM King Moshoeshoe II. He was subsequently deposed by the Military Council in a decree issued in November 1990 and his eldest son was sworn in as HM King Letsie III.

Difficulties between HM Moshoeshoe II and the Military Council intensified in May 1992 with the former's determined efforts to return to Lesotho against the expressed wishes of the Government.

On 5 June 1992, talks were held in London under the auspices of the Commonwealth Secretary-General between HM Moshoeshoe II and the Chairman of the Military Council, Major-General Ramaema, to reach agreement on a basis for the former's return to Lesotho. Previously, the Commonwealth Secretariat had assisted in the establishment of a Joint Committee in Maseru charged with considering matters connected with the situation.

In the London Agreed Statement of 5 June (text is at *Annex X*) it was agreed that the early return to Lesotho should proceed in a manner that would enhance the prospects for greater peace, stability and national reconciliation. It was recognised that this objective implied the continuation in office of the existing administration and the protection of the integrity of the ongoing process of democratisation leading to national elections. HM Moshoeshoe II subsequently returned to Lesotho on 20 July 1992. HM King Letsie III remained in office.

### **The Political Parties**

Following the lifting of the ban on party political activity, 17 parties registered with 12 eventually participating in the election. The race was essentially

between the two main parties, the BNP and the BCP. Both parties had candidates nominated for each of the 65 seats in the new National Assembly. The third main party was the royalist Marematlou Freedom Party. The 12 parties which took part in the election were:

**Basotho National Party (BNP)** led by Mr Rets'elisitsoe Sekhonyana, former Finance Minister in General Lekhanya's Military Government;

**Basutoland Congress Party (BCP)** led by its founder leader, Dr Ntsu Mokhehle;

**Hareeing Basotho** led by Mr Khauta Khasu;

**Kopanang Basotho Party** led by Ms Limakatso Ntakatsane;

**Lesotho Educational Party** led by Mr M Pitso;

**Lesotho Labour Party** led by Mr P Majoro;

**Liberal Party of Lesotho** led by Mr Paul Mollett;

**Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP)** led by Mr Vincent Malebo, former Minister of Information and Broadcasting in General Lekhanya's Military Government;

**National Democratic Party** led by Mr Joseph Bereng Bereng;

**National Independent Party** led by Mr Antone C Manyeli;

**Popular Front for Democracy (PFD)** led by Mr Rakali Khits'ane;

**United Party** led by Mr Makara Sekautu.