

Master of Ceremonies, Dr Ntatho Motlana;
Kgosigadi Semane Molotlegi;
Honourable Minister Patrick Balope;
Representative of the Government of Botswana;
Provincial Premier, Mr. Popo Molefe;
Honourable Dikgosi and Dikgosana;
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me, at the outset, to convey the heartfelt condolences of the South African nation to Kgosigadi Semane Molotlegi, her children, and other members of the Royal family and to the entire Bafokeng people. The Government and the people of South Africa share in your loss.

The esteem in which a community is held by other people, as well as its course and destiny, are influenced by the character of its leadership. In Kgosi Lebone Molotlegi, the Bafokeng people had one of the most brilliant and courageous leaders in the country.

Throughout his reign he fought relentlessly for the dignity and rights of his people. His dedication to the service of the Bafokeng, and indeed all the people of South Africa, earned him the hatred of those who sought to enslave and subjugate. He was harassed and humiliated and forced into exile.

But Kgosi Lebone shouldered that cross with dignity and fortitude. From the obscurity of exile his defiant voice could still be heard reverberating throughout our country: "Down with Bantustan oppression; Freedom for my people."

In his tireless efforts to improve the lives of his people, the King put to good use all the available material and human resources. The land here is endowed with rich platinum-group metal deposits. Under Kgosi Lebone's stewardship the community has been able to use royalties paid by the Impala Platinum Mines to construct roads; a modern health care centre; a post office; schools; and a huge civic centre. One wonders how much they would have achieved had it not been for the Apartheid and Bantustan injustices.

The current legal battle between the Bafokeng people and mining houses is a stark reminder of the awkward economic legacy we inherited. Government will not interfere in the legal process, but it is not disinterested in the case whose outcome, we believe, will have wide impact.

Government is busy formulating a policy on the ownership of mineral resources. Consultation will ensure that the resulting policy accommodates the aspirations of all stakeholders while ensuring that the mining industry retains its central position within the engine room of economic reconstruction.

Amongst our strategic objectives is the goal of ensuring that mining rights are made available to small entrepreneurs and that ownership of the industry is opened up to previously excluded communities. This also was the vision of Kgosi Lebone Molotlegi. It will be the duty of his successor, the Bafokeng people, and indeed all the people of South Africa, to continue the struggle for economic empowerment on all fronts.

During this delicate period of mourning and transition we urge the members of this community to close ranks and not to allow differences of opinion to drive them apart. You are one people. The practice of prohibiting non-Bafokeng persons from being buried in the same graveyard, regardless of their sojourn within this community, is a blight on the esteem and respect in which our nation holds this community and on the dignity of Kgosi Molotlegi in particular. Nevertheless, this issue should be left to the community to sort out on its own in accordance with the new culture of our rainbow nation.

Kgosi Lebone departed at a time when we had just concluded our first democratic community elections. The establishment of democratic local authorities in rural areas needs to be handled with great sensitivity. We are confident that this community will assist the new leader to play his constructive role in the process. In all villages under Kgosi Lebone's jurisdiction, the elections went smoothly, and we look forward to an equally smooth establishment of local councils.

This is in everyone's interest. We need one another and we all have a role to play now and in the future. The improvement of our lives and the future stability of our localities depend on these councils. An amicable relationship between the Kgosi and the newly-elected councillors will give local democracy in the rural areas a strong foundation.

Bafokeng People;

As we bid our final farewell to our beloved Kgosi Lebone, let us look back at his heroic record and reflect on the love he had for this community. Let us, for a moment, focus on his vision of a prosperous future and pledge that we shall never rest until that ideal is realised.

Thank you.

Issued by: Office of the President