

REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

INDEPENDENCE DAY MESSAGE

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY LT. GENERAL DR.
SERETSE KHAMA IAN KHAMA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

ON THE

OCCASION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY
OF INDEPENDENCE

THEME: NATIONAL UNITY AND SELF RELIANCE

30th September, 2016

1. I would like to commence by thanking your Majesties and Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government, and other distinguished representatives of nations for your support and encouragement by your presence here today, with the people of Botswana. This demonstration of solidarity is greatly appreciated by us all.

2. My fellow citizens, exactly 50 years ago, on a Friday like today, the 30th September 1966, the men and women of this country demonstrated exceptional courage and foresight when they established Botswana as a sovereign Republic.

3. With the benefit of hindsight, their determination to claim for themselves, and posterity, their God given right to be the architects of their own destiny may appear to have been an easy choice.

4. Given our nation's subsequent progress many may not be aware of just how daunting the economic, political and social challenges our people faced back then were like.

5. At that time, we were listed as one of the world's ten least developed countries. We were lacking in basic infrastructure, as well as tangible wealth. Illiteracy was widespread, while less than seventy people in the territory then possessed any form of post secondary school qualification.

6. Most outside experts were, in fact, of the view that we would remain dependent on the handouts of others. Surrounded as we were, by hostile white minority rule regimes, many dismissed our potential to survive, much less prosper as a non-racial democracy. But, by focusing on our visible poverty, what most outsiders failed to see was our hidden

wealth in our character and determination as a people.

7. Beyond the largely untapped potential of our natural resources, our society was already rich in its values of Democracy and self-help. Our geographical and political, as well as economic vulnerability was mitigated by the strength of our time-tested capacity for mutual support.

8. In 1966, it was thus largely we, and we alone, who were most confident in our capacity to set out on our own path of nation building.

9. Let us therefore, today pay humble tribute to the founding patriots who started us on our journey towards achieving a *'United and Proud Nation.'* Today's Botswana is thus the legacy of visionaries who had the confidence to ignore the many sceptics who insisted that we were then too poor, too small, and too weak.

10. Where others saw hopelessness, those Patriotic Pioneers were empowered by hope and wisdom. Above all they had faith in themselves and their fellow citizens.

11. As we celebrate our progress over the past fifty years, let us further contemplate what we can and should achieve if we continue to work together in the next fifty years, while building a society that delivers a dignified life for all.

12. Appreciating how far we have come from the time we had relatively little, should inspire us to achieve much more with what we now have.

13. While we have come a long way over the years in achieving higher middle income status, with dramatically reduced poverty and greater social wellbeing, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels.

14. We are only able to celebrate today because our forebears proved willing and able to overcome the challenges of the past, through persistence and hard work. If we too are to leave a better Botswana in our wake, we, like them, must also be prepared to do much more with less.

15. As citizens of a great nation, with the potential for still greater achievements let us embrace each other and our opportunities as we proceed along the path to our centenary. It is my honour and privilege to be President on this occasion, especially as I remember that it was my father who stood here as the First President of the Republic of Botswana on Independence Day in 1966. I am also reminded, and hereto acknowledge and thank my predecessors, Their Excellencies, Former Presidents, Sir Ketumile Masire and Festus Mogae for their service to the nation.

16. Going forward we must continue to entrench Democracy and good governance and continue to add our voice with others in the International Community where there is lack thereof, and continue to practise zero tolerance of corruption and self interest. We must strive for even more self reliance and to build further on our developments. We must remain at peace with ourselves and with our neighbours for everlasting stability. We will continue to invest in the dignity and prosperity of our citizens so that each one can sparkle like our diamonds, whilst ensuring we continue to conserve our environment and natural resources. Where we may have had shortcomings we take the blame, where we have succeeded we thank God for His guidance and blessings and with His guidance we hope to succeed going into the future.

17. In conclusion I would like to say a big thank you to the organisers of BOT50 led by the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, to all the participants here

in Gaborone and countrywide who have contributed to showcasing this occasion and to the nation at large. May God bless you all.

18. Thank you for your attention.

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