

STATEMENT BY THE RT. HON. PRIME MINISTER

CLEOPAS SIPHO DLAMINI

AT THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 28 JULY 2021

Honourable Speaker of the House of Assembly

Honourable Members of Parliament

May I, from the onset, express my appreciation Mr Speaker for the opportunity I have been afforded to make this statement to this Honourable House.

Mr Speaker, the Kingdom of Eswatini has a remarkable history of peace, unity and stability spanning over centuries. This has not been achieved because we always see eye to eye but is a result of the collective agreement between us as a people to jealously protect our peace even when we differ, with the understanding that no meaningful development can spring from an environment laden with anarchy.

We have rallied together at all times to tap into our innate sense of humanity – buntfu-, in spite of our differences, in recognition of the age old idiom that ‘I am because you are” and with the knowledge that we have strong structures and pillars upon which we can always rely on to raise our concerns. We pride ourselves with traditions and a culture that defines us, supported by an unwavering commitment to the values that make Eswatini a beacon of hope and stability.

Our Tinkhundla system has evolved over the years from a time when we conducted our elections through an electoral college to the current direct representation to Parliament. These political changes were not effected under threat or intimidation, neither did they come under the barrel of a gun but through engagement, consultation and consensus using our well established structures of engagement.

The events of the past month where violence took centre stage in many parts of the country, with the unfortunate loss of lives and damage to public and private infrastructure that set back our economy by an estimated E3 billion are not acceptable and do not reflect our well established values of constructive engagement.

Mr Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to express my, and Government's, sincere condolences to all those who lost family members and their loved ones during the recent riots. The loss of one life is one too many and there can never be any justification for the level of violence that filled our streets. May I further sympathise with all who were injured and those whose businesses were affected in the massive scale of violence, looting and arson propagated by criminal elements that engulfed our country, destroying vital infrastructure including many of our Tinkhundla Centres.

Such a level of violence is foreign to our country and should never be allowed to surface again. The level of disinformation peddled by agents and instigators of violence on different platforms is condemned.

Mr Speaker you will recall that the violence sprung out from the process of delivering petitions to 51 Tinkhundla. What became concerning was the level of violence that erupted at the delivery of these petitions to some of the Tinkhundla, coupled with the blatant disregard of COVID-19 regulations and protocols at a time when the Kingdom was at the brink of a third wave.

In essence, Mr Speaker, the petitions raised concerns in two categories; that being

- a) Governance and politics;
- b) Service delivery issues.

It is prudent to remind the House that our Constitution provides procedures and provisions to be followed when amendments are proposed to invoke changes in the Constitution. We are all custodians of this Constitution which was a result of nationwide consultations with emaSwati. No one should avoid these processes under any circumstance and resort to short cuts with threats of violence.

During the recent Sibaya, His Majesty gave guidance on a national dialogue, where he assured the nation that such a dialogue will be held once COVID-19 is no longer a threat and physical meetings can be safely held. May I reiterate His Majesty's counsel that some of the political reforms that are being touted by a section of society require constitutional amendments and can therefore only be achieved if the Constitution is followed and all emaSwati are engaged.

As Government, we strongly discourage threats and intimidation against those seen to be of different political views, including the

cyber bullying that we recently witnessed as a country. Mr Speaker, may I make it clear that threats and intimidation against people with whom you disagree go against the spirit of democracy to which our Tinkhundla system fully subscribes. Eswatini is a country that respects the freedom of expression as enshrined in our constitution.

However, threats and violence against those we do not agree with are misplaced under the banner of freedom of expression and so is hate speech. We need to make a clear distinction between freedom of expression and inciting violence that threatens lives. The rule of law should be upheld at all times and Government will not hesitate to bring to book anyone who instigates violence under the guise of freedom of expression.

Mr Speaker, I am aware of allegations of police brutality which have been raised in several instances recently. As Minister responsible for police I want to assure the nation that these will be investigated and dealt with appropriately.

Noteworthy though is that it has become common for protesters to intimidate, threaten, insult and provoke police. It has become a norm for protesters to hurl rocks at the police. This is criminal and

has no place in our society. Police are there to protect us at all times and also rely on our cooperation and respect. Respect of the rule of law is sacrosanct and we should refrain from activities that tend to brew violence and instability.

Police investigations have revealed that in the past days the country has been under siege from insurgents posing as protesters who committed many serious crimes. Some of them have since been arrested and have already had their day in court, while investigations are still ongoing.

Mr Speaker, regrettably, among those who have been arrested are two Members of this august House. We are aware Mr Speaker that there has been talk that these members have been arrested for voicing out their political views. We wish to put it on record that these allegations are unfounded and the arrests are in no way politically motivated. We trust our justice system to give them a free and fair trial. For now, they remain innocent until proven guilty and we cannot engage on this matter any further as it is now subjudice.

We wish to express our gratitude to His Majesty King Mswati III for establishing a Reconstruction Fund with an initial amount of E500 million, which we believe will go a long way in assisting victims of

the recent violence. We will rely on Parliament to speedily approve our request for a supplementary budget to kick-start the Fund so that people can start sending in their applications for relief funding.

The economic effects of the recent violent riots marred by looting and burning of Government and private property left a devastating trail of destruction on the economy; which is why one of our primary focus will be economic recovery in line with the Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan.

Mr Speaker, I can assure the House and the Nation that Government is alive to the concerns of emaSwati, especially in relation to inefficiencies in service delivery. Government is equally concerned with the unacceptable rate of unemployment mainly affecting the youth. We have put in place several interventions to address this nagging challenge with haste, and we are committed to doubling our efforts to ensure that all emaSwati have ample opportunities to grow and succeed. I will soon be addressing this matter specifically in a separate communique.

We are committed to facilitating the creation of more employment opportunities for the youth while guiding them to fully utilise the funds availed by Government to assist emaSwati entrepreneurs

who want to venture into business. These include the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund, the Regional Development Fund, Small Scale Loan Guarantee Scheme, Export Credit Guarantee Scheme, the MSME Revolving Fund, the Informal Traders Fund and others.

We shall put more focus on infrastructure rehabilitation, education, access to health services, agriculture and ICT as these are some of the key components of the Strategic Roadmap 2019-2022. This is over and above investment facilitation and job creation. Cabinet has assured me of their commitment to run this race with speed and precision in order to change the quality of life for eMaSwati.

All our efforts will be fruitless if COVID-19 continues to run rampage on our people and affect lives and livelihoods. We have regrettably witnessed a sharp increase in the number of deaths and infections over the past weeks due to this vicious virus. The Ministry of Health is working day and night to save lives and to ensure that all testing and treatment services are available for all that need them. This is despite the unfortunate losses suffered by the health sector during the riots where some health facilities, including testing and vaccination sites were torched and ambulances attacked and destroyed.

Mr Speaker, we pass our gratitude to all our partners and friends who have made contributions to our fight in combating COVID-19. One of the most effective ways to mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is to ensure that more vaccines are accessed by emaSwati. Just yesterday, the Kingdom received over 300 000 doses of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine donated by the Government of the United States through the COVAX facility. Our target is to make sure that a vast majority of the country's adult population and frontline workers are vaccinated by the end of August.

The education sector has been severely affected by this pandemic for over a year now. Mr Speaker, I will soon be making an announcement on the opening of schools. In the meantime, the Ministry of Health will be working in collaboration with the education sector to start vaccinating teachers and education workers next week.

As I conclude, Mr Speaker, I wish to reiterate our commitment to the ideals of sustainable peace and stability which are the foundation from which we can reconstruct and transform our economy and lives of all emaSwati. We are united in creating an

Eswatini we want for all of us and future generations. Nothing and no one should divide us. I pledge to work closely with Parliament to advance the lofty goals of this nation.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.