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## **World Water Day Commemoration**

**Theme: *Water and Gender***

**Remarks by EU Delegation Head of Delegation**

**H.E. Mette SUNNERGREN**

**10 April 2026**

*I present my respects to His Majesty King Letsie III and Her Majesty Queen 'Masenate,*

*The Right Honourable the Prime Minister, Ntsokoane Samuel Matekane,*

*The Honourable President of the Senate, Mamonaheng Mokitimi,*

*The Right Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly, Tlohang Sekhamane,*

*His Lordship the Chief Justice, Sakoane Sakoane,*

*The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Mme Nthomeng Majara,*

*Honorable Ministers in His Majesty's Cabinet, and in particular:*

*The Honourable Minister of Finance and Development Planning also Member of Parliament for Qalabane, Dr. Rets'ilisitsoe Matlanyane*

*The Honourable Minister of Education, Prof, Ntoi Rapapa*

*The Honourable Minister of Natural Resources, Hon. Mohlomi Moleko*

*The Honourable Minister of Gender, Youth and Social Development, Hon Lesaoana Pitso*

*Their Excellences Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations and members of their teams and in particular;*

*The Country Representative of UNICEF, Deepak Bhaskaran*

*The National Director – World Vision Lesotho, James Chifwelu*

*Honourable Vice President of the Senate, Ntate Tsukulane Au*

*Honourable Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Mme Tšepang Tšita-Mosena*

*Honourable members of the National Assembly and of the Senate and Principal Chiefs,*

*Government officials*

*Representatives of Civil Society Organisations,*

*Members of the Media,*

*All protocols observed*

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Lumelang Bo-'Mé le Bo-Ntate,

I express my gratitude to the Government of Lesotho for the organization of this event today as we commemorate World Water day.

This year's theme—**“Water and Gender”**—is a powerful reminder that water is not just a resource; it is a **responsibility that falls disproportionately on the shoulders of women and girls.**

This year will mark 50 years of the partnership between the Kingdom of Lesotho and the European Union, and **water (*metsi*)**, has been at the centre of this partnership.

Our joint efforts in the water sector with the Government of Lesotho has resulted in the development of the formative studies of the Lesotho Highlands Development Water Project Phase I, support to the 'Muela Hydropower station and the construction of the Metolong dam and distribution of water to the towns of Roma, Morija, TY and Maseru.

Currently, our partnership includes support Lesotho Lowlands Water Development Project phase II, which will include delivering of water in the districts of Mafeteng and Mohale's Hoek. In addition, we have recently started the implementation of the Integrated Catchment Management programme – ReNoka phase II which has in the previous phase also supported the Likhethla Sub Catchment within the Mafeteng district.

Honourable Ministers, you will recall that two years ago we signed the Metsi A Lesotho financing agreement, which together, we observed some of its results Mohales Hoek in 2025. Today we are proud to announce that Mafeteng and Mokhotlong districts have been included and therefore will see improved access of WASH services especially in the rural areas of Mafeteng.

Bo'mme le bo'ntate, Lesotho, is often described as the "Water Tower of Southern Africa" and portrayed as a country rich in water. With only about 3% of the basin territory, the country contributes 40% of the Senqu-Orange River basin and provides around one-third of the water in Gauteng.

However, not all Basotho have access to clean water. 22% of the National population still does not have access to clean water and the figure is disproportionately higher in rural areas<sup>1</sup>.

Lesotho has committed to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6: Access to universal coverage of WASH services by 2030, therefore, this calls for our joint efforts in accelerating improving access to WASH services.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.sdg6data.org/en/country-or-area/lesotho#anchor\\_6.1.1](https://www.sdg6data.org/en/country-or-area/lesotho#anchor_6.1.1)

And if we are to achieve SDG 6, we cannot leave half our population behind. When water is scarce, women and girls pay the highest price.

- **Women and girls in Lesotho spend up to 4 hours a day** collecting water—time that could be spent in **school, earning an income, or caring for their families.**
- **Girls are 3 times more likely to drop out of school** when water sources are far from home, as they are often pulled from classes to help fetch water.
- **1 in 3 women in rural Lesotho** reports **back pain, exhaustion, or even injury** from carrying heavy water containers over long distances.
- **Gender-based violence** increases when women must travel far for water, especially in isolated areas.

This is not just a **water crisis**—it is a **gender justice crisis.**

We know that **when women are involved in water decision-making, projects are more successful, sustainable, and equitable.** Yet, in Lesotho, as in much of the world, **women remain underrepresented in water governance.**

- **Globally, women hold less than 17% of leadership roles in water utilities**—Lesotho must do better.
- **Studies show** that when women participate in water committees, **systems are 35% more likely to remain functional** because they prioritise **maintenance, hygiene, and community needs.**

Lesotho has already taken steps in the right direction:

The **WASH in Schools Guidelines**, to be launched, will help **keep girls in school** by ensuring **safe, private sanitation facilities**—critical for **menstrual hygiene management.**

The **ReNoka programme** has engaged **women’s groups in catchment management**, proving that **local women are the best stewards of their own water resources.**

But we must do more—and faster.

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As I conclude, I wish to challenge us to continue to do more in passing critical legislation including the Water Resources Management Bill, the Water and Sanitation Services Bill and the Bulk Water Authority.

I further reaffirm the support the EU and team Europe towards support of the water sector.

Let us all remember that water is life, let’s protect it.

Thank you.

Khotso. Pula. Nala.