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Government of Eswatini – United Nations
Dialogue on the New United Nations
Sustainable Development Cooperation
Framework (UNSDCF) 2026-2030

16 JANUARY 2025

HAPPY VALLEY HOTEL, EZULWINI

Your Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers present,
Distinguished Representatives of the United Nations,
Government Officials,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

I am pleased to join you today at this important dialogue between the Government of Eswatini and the United Nations. I sincerely thank each of you for your participation and commitment as, together, we seize the opportunity to shape the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (CF) for 2026-2030.

I must thank the Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Office as well as the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development for organising this meeting. Our meeting today is testament to the strong relationship that exists between the Kingdom of Eswatini and the United Nations in the common effort to achieve sustainable prosperity and improve lives.

We stand at a crossroads, compelled by the pressing realities of our time to act decisively and innovatively, towards a shared vision of progress, prosperity, and sustainability for the Kingdom of Eswatini. Today's dialogue serves as a cornerstone for strengthening the partnership between the United Nations and the Government of Eswatini. It provides an essential platform to objectively exchange perspectives, share ideas, and foster deeper connections. Through this engagement, we are building

a stronger foundation of mutual understanding, paving the way for a united and aligned vision to guide our collective efforts.

As a country, we celebrate our rich cultural heritage, the beauty of our people and the land, and our resilient spirit and determination to achieve our vision. We also acknowledge that the Kingdom of Eswatini is faced with a series of challenges which we must overcome in order to achieve our vision of transformation. These challenges, many of which were highlighted during the People's Parliament at Sibaya, are undeniable. They include widespread unemployment, with approximately 35.4% of our workforce without jobs, a poverty rate of 58.9%, a struggling healthcare system, and the scourge of Gender-Based Violence, which affects 1 in 3 of our women by the age of 18.

These issues are compounded by declining education standards, growing corruption, and limited fiscal space for essential developmental programs. Our public service delivery index, at a mere 0.35, underscores the urgent need for transformation in governance and service delivery. Additionally, climate change, increasing inequality, and a lack of national cohesion further threaten our Nation's progress.

Looking forward, the Government of Eswatini envisions a new strategy for an era characterised by inclusivity, resilience, and prosperity. Guided by His Majesty's visionary call for "Nkwe!"—a bold and agile approach to national development—we aim to build a Nation where every liSwati can thrive.

Our vision for the future is clear: "A well-developed, inclusive, peaceful, stable, and economically prosperous Kingdom of Eswatini, established on cultural values and delivering well-being to all emaSwati."

As already articulated previously; to achieve our transformation, His Majesty's Government has identified several strategic pillars for focused intervention. And, as we develop our new Cooperation Framework for the period 2026-2030 as the definitive partnership agreement between Eswatini and the United Nations, it will be expected that these strategic pillars will be at the core of our partnership.

1. Transforming Public Service and Strengthening Governance:

Building a modern, world-class public service is at the heart of our development agenda. As emphasised in our August 2024 policy statement, we are committed to decentralising services, fostering accountability, and leveraging digital innovation. By adopting global best practices and strengthening partnerships with international institutions and the private sector, we will ensure a skilled and capable public service that is focused on excellence and delivers efficient, transparent, and timely services to all citizens. Our governance system, deeply rooted in Swazi traditions and values, remains a unifying force. We will celebrate and strengthen democratic processes while safeguarding cultural sovereignty. Discussions at the People's Parliament highlighted the importance of emaSwati-led governance structures, such as the Tinkhundla System, as a means of preserving identity and fostering self-determination. Equity is central to our development agenda. We will ensure equal access to quality education, healthcare, and infrastructure, addressing disparities across

all regions and empowering marginalised groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

2. Education and Health:

Education and health are the cornerstones of our human capital development and a necessary investment the Nation's transformation. While free primary education has expanded access, our focus must now shift to transforming the educational system to equip youth with 21st-century skills. This includes integrating vocational and tertiary education aligned with global economic demands, as well as incorporating Swati governance principles into the curricula to preserve cultural traditions. Similarly, reforming the healthcare system is imperative. Challenges such as inadequate medicines, a shortage of health personnel, and service delivery gaps must be addressed through innovation and strategic partnerships. Our goal is universal access to quality healthcare—turning this aspiration into reality through an overall and comprehensive education system analysis for a multisectoral approach for improved quality.

3. Economic Transformation and Job Creation: Economic transformation is a key priority for Eswatini, and we are focused on driving inclusive growth. Without growing our economy and creating opportunities, we will not be able to eliminate poverty, put our young people to work, or have the resources we need to invest in the social sectors. Creating a business-friendly environment that attracts investment, fosters industrialisation, and supports key sectors like agriculture, infrastructure, manufacturing, and services is central to our development strategy. Achieving energy security, diversifying the

economy, promoting trade and export-oriented strategies, and encouraging active private-sector participation are vital for unlocking foreign direct investment, boosting job creation, and empowering marginalised groups.

Innovation and technology will be central to our economic transformation. We plan to invest in digital infrastructure, advance technological developments, and promote a green economy through renewable energy and sustainable practices. Reducing reliance on external sources and ensuring long-term stability, while fostering a Government-led and business-ready environment, will help attract significant investments and promote diversification.

We aim to unlock opportunities for private-sector involvement and foreign direct investment by improving infrastructure, reforming tax policies, and ensuring responsible pension fund management. Recognising that our youth are the foundation of Eswatini's future, we are committed to prioritising vocational training, STEM education, and entry-level job creation to equip young people with the skills needed to contribute to our Nation's prosperity. Policies supporting entrepreneurship and innovation will be essential in fostering economic independence among our youth.

- 4. Food Security and Sovereignty:** Agriculture remains the backbone of Eswatini's economy. To achieve food sovereignty within the next 15 years, we will invest in sustainable farming, irrigation, and agricultural innovation. By empowering farmers, communities, and the private sector, we aim to build a resilient food system that feeds our Nation,

creates jobs, and drives rural economic growth. We must also think beyond food production for food security only to seeing agriculture as a key fact in our economic growth and opportunity creation.

5. Strengthening Disaster Preparedness and Management:

Acknowledging the urgency of climate change, we will prioritise renewable energy, enhance natural resource management, and implement disaster preparedness strategies. Our commitment to environmental sustainability will ensure that economic growth is not achieved at the expense of future generations. The Government of Eswatini is committed to reducing vulnerability to disasters and emergencies. Climate-induced crises and the current refugee situation highlight the need for proactive disaster risk reduction, enhanced early warning systems, and community resilience-building.

In short, we have an ambitious and clear vision of where we want to go. It is imperative that emaSwati and the Government they elected lead the way, taking a focused approach and finding home-grown solutions that prioritise the interests of the country and its people.

Eswatini cannot walk the journey of transformation alone but must build the necessary partnerships and collaboration to leverage resources, expertise and best practices to ensure our efforts are impactful and contribute to the long-term progress of Eswatini.

In this context, I wish to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our development partners for their support and commitment to Eswatini's

development agenda. Their contributions have been instrumental in driving progress in key sectors, including health, agriculture, MSME development, and youth empowerment, amongst others. These successes stand as a testament to the transformative power of partnerships built on mutual respect, shared goals, and collective accountability. The United Nations has been a trusted, impartial partner in these efforts, leveraging its broad global reach, technical expertise, and credibility to support Eswatini in addressing complex challenges and unlocking opportunities for sustainable growth.

I am pleased to note that the current United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2021–2025) is nearing its conclusion and has undergone a comprehensive external evaluation. This enables us to reflect on our shared achievements and forge a path for new perspectives and commitments.

As we transition to the next UNSDCF, it is essential that we build on these foundations, strengthening the alignment of global support with Eswatini's national priorities. Let us continue to appreciate and harness the knowledge, resources, and commitment of our development partners to achieve a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous future for all emaSwati.

Now, looking ahead and drawing on the recommendations from this evaluation, I wish to emphasise the following four key messages:

1. **Tailor the next CF support to Eswatini's unique needs**, focusing on fewer but high-impact strategic and joint interventions that align with

national priorities. The Government of Eswatini calls for a shift away from continued action driven by international perspectives and global initiatives. Instead, we seek UN action that is specifically tailored to the needs of our people and addresses the unique challenges that Eswatini faces.

2. **Promote a cohesive and results-driven approach by fostering coordination and unity across all UN agencies.** The findings from the UNSDCF 2021-2025 evaluation highlighted gaps in coordination, which must be addressed both from the UN and Government side to reduce inefficiencies and ensure a more coherent approach to planning and implementation of the next CF. The Government of Eswatini envisions a more united and coherent United Nations, where individual entities operate as one cohesive team aligned with our national agenda with the CF as our compass.
3. **Simplify Government engagement with the United Nations,** reducing the complexity of interactions while delivering focused and effective support. We do not view the UN as a collection of separate entities but as One United Nations working towards common goals in partnership with our Nation. Therefore, it is important that the Cooperation Framework remains the primary document to guide UN's cooperation with Eswatini.
4. **National priorities must take precedence over the UN's global agendas and mandates:** We appreciate that the UN has a multiplicity of mandates and policies. At the same time, the UN must always align its work to the national priorities and agenda. Once agreed through this

dialogical process, I urge that we commit to faithfully implement the agreed programmes and hold ourselves accountable to delivering the results that will change the lives of emaSwati. Interventions should not be undertaken for their own sake or merely to satisfy mandates, but rather to transform lives.

Honourable ministers, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the challenges before us are formidable, but they are not insurmountable. Together with Government, the United Nations can craft a comprehensive CF that is visionary, inclusive, and transformative - a framework that truly reflects the hopes and aspirations of all emaSwati.

As an African proverb wisely reminds us, ***“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together,”*** our journey towards a prosperous Eswatini cannot be achieved in isolation. It requires Government and the UN’s collective commitment, wisdom, and effort.

I therefore call upon all Government officials here today to commit to working closely with the United Nations in designing and implementing a highly results-oriented UNSDCF. Let us approach this process with unity, resolve, and an unwavering focus on delivering tangible outcomes for the people of Eswatini. It is imperative that we ensure the United Nations’ work in our country is aligned with our national priorities, marked by focused, strategic action, and characterised by improved coordination—both within the UN and with our Government.

Together, we have the power to transform challenges into opportunities and aspirations into realities. Let us seize this moment to chart a course for a brighter future, built on partnership, innovation, and determination.

I thank you.