

YOUR MAJESTY THE INDLOVUKAZI,
EMAKHOSIKATI,
YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESSES,
ACTING PRIME MINISTER,
COUNCILLORS,
CHIEFS,
CHIEF JUSTICE,
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER,
CABINET MINISTERS,
EXCELLENCIES, MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS,
PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF SENATE,
SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY,
DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

SIYANIVUSELA NONKHE BEKUNENE EPHALAMENDE

INTRODUCTION

IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE FOR ME TO BE HERE TODAY FOR THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI.

WE WELCOME ALL WHO ARE PRESENT HERE AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE JOINED US THROUGH THE VARIOUS SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS. IT HAS BECOME EVIDENT THAT THIS WILL NOW BE OUR WAY OF MEETING ONE ANOTHER SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC, WHICH HAS NEGATIVELY IMPACTED THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI AND THE ENTIRE WORLD.

THE PANDEMIC, WHICH HAS BROUGHT ABOUT A NEW NORMAL TO OUR WAY OF LIFE, IS WORSE THAN THE WORLD WARS WITNESSED ACROSS THE GLOBE IN THE PAST. THIS UNDERSCORES THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION WE ARE FACED WITH.

NATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC, THE KINGDOM HAS HAD TO PUT IN PLACE COVID-19 REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES TO PROTECT HER PEOPLE.

THE NATION HAS BEEN WELL EDUCATED ON SAFETY MEASURES SUCH AS SOCIAL DISTANCING, STEPS TO TAKE WHEN ONE IS INFECTED, HOW TO PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE BY WASHING HANDS AND SANITISING.

EMPHASIS HAS ALSO BEEN MADE ON THE WEARING OF MASKS TO ENSURE THAT WE ARE ALL PROTECTED AS WELL AS ENCOURAGING OUR CITIZENS TO LIVE HEALTHY LIFESTYLES. WE THANK GOD THAT ESWATINI IS NOW ABLE TO PRODUCE THE SURGICAL MASKS AND OTHER PROTECTIVE CLOTHING.

THE COUNTRY ALSO EFFECTED PARTIAL LOCKDOWNS TO KEEP PEOPLE AT HOME, ALLOWING MOVEMENT ONLY FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS. THIS PROVED TO BE VERY EFFECTIVE AS IT CURBED THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS.

WE WISH TO COMMEND THE SPIRIT OF COOPERATION DISPLAYED BY THE NATION DURING THE PARTIAL LOCKDOWNS AS THIS HELPED PEOPLE PROTECT THEMSELVES AS WELL AS OTHERS.

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWNS AND MAINTAINING FOCUS

SADLY, KEEPING PEOPLE AT HOME HAS ALSO MEANT CLOSING SCHOOLS AND MANY OF OUR CHILDREN ARE NOW LAGGING BEHIND IN THEIR LESSONS, AS ONLY A FEW ARE ATTENDING CLASSES.

A YEAR HAS GONE BY AND WE ARE ALL KEEN TO SEE ALL OUR CHILDREN RETURN TO SCHOOL. WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT THIS PROCESS IS CARRIED WITH DUE CARE AND ATTENTION SO AS TO REALISE A SAFE RE-OPENING ENVIRONMENT THAT WILL NOT CAUSE A RISE IN NEW INFECTIONS.

THE LOSS OF JOBS AND INCOME AND THE LACK OF ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES, HAVE ALSO BROUGHT ABOUT TENSIONS IN SOME HOMES, AND WE HAVE SEEN A RISE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES.

IT IS CERTAINLY NOT EASY WHEN OUR LIFESTYLES ARE FRUSTRATED BY THE LACK OF ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS, BUT WE STRONGLY DISCOURAGE TAKING OUT THESE PROBLEMS ON OUR FAMILY MEMBERS AND OTHERS.

MAY WE REMIND AND CAUTION THE NATION NOT TO LOSE FOCUS BUT JOIN HANDS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THIS OUTBREAK, SO WE COME OUT WITH WAYS AND MEANS OF WINNING THE BATTLE.

RECOGNISING FRONTLINE WORKERS

IN THE MIDST OF IT ALL, WE WISH TO RECOGNISE AND COMMEND ALL THE FRONTLINE HEALTH WORKERS. THEY HAVE BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE COUNTRY'S FIGHT AGAINST THE PANDEMIC. YOU ARE OUR HEROES.

THROUGH YOUR BRAVERY, YOU HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ENTER THE FACILITIES FULL OF COVID-19 PATIENTS TO GIVE THEM LIFE. WE ALL NEED TO APPLAUD THIS SELFLESS DEDICATION TO YOUR CALL OF DUTY.

PRAYERS FOR COVID-19 VICTIMS

UNFORTUNATELY, COVID-19 HAS MANAGED TO CLAIM SOME CASUALTIES AS OVER 600 OF OUR PEOPLE, AMONG WHOM WERE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC, HAVE LOST THEIR LIVES TO THE VIRUS.

WE ALSO RECOGNISE OUR HEALTH CARE WORKERS WHO CONTRACTED THE DISEASE WHILE RESPONDING TO THEIR CALLING.

THIS IS VERY SAD BECAUSE WE HAVE LOST VALUABLE EXPERTISE THAT WAS PROVIDING ESSENTIAL SUPPORT TO THOSE IN NEED. MAY THEY BE BLESSED FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE NATIONAL CAUSE, WHICH HAS HELPED MANY PEOPLE RECOVER AND ARE BACK WITH THEIR LOVED ONES.

TO ALL THE FAMILIES WHO HAVE LOST THEIR RELATIVES AND TO THOSE WHO ARE GOING THROUGH THE HEALING PROCESS WHILE RECEIVING MEDICAL ATTENTION, WHEREVER THEY MAY BE, WE SAY REST ASSURED THAT OUR PRAYERS ARE WITH YOU.

COVID-19 AND OUR HEALTH SYSTEMS

FROM THE DAY THE VIRUS WAS DISCOVERED IN THE COUNTRY, GOVERNMENT HAS GONE ALL OUT TO FIGHT THIS PANDEMIC. IN THE PROCESS WE DISCOVERED THERE WERE MANY AREAS THAT COULD BE DEVELOPED TO PROVIDE SERVICES WE LACKED IN THE PAST.

WE MANAGED TO DEVELOP A MEDICAL LABORATORY THAT HAS ENABLED US TO PRODUCE COVID-19 TEST RESULTS LOCALLY, WHEREAS WE PREVIOUSLY HAD TO SEND OUR SAMPLES TO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.

THE OUTBREAK HAS PRESENTED A NEED FOR THE COUNTRY TO LOOK INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LOCAL CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC). THIS WOULD AID EARLY DETECTION OF VIRUSES AND FUTURE OUTBREAKS AND CAN ALSO ASSIST IN ANALYSING NEW VACCINES PRIOR TO USE BY THE NATION.

THE COUNTRY HAS ALSO BEEN EQUIPPED WITH AN OXYGEN SUPPLY FACILITY TO AVERT A LIFE-THREATENING SHORTAGE THAT WAS EXPERIENCED FOR A WHILE. THESE FACILITIES HAVE ALREADY DEMONSTRATED HOW THEY WILL STRENGTHEN OUR HEALTH SYSTEMS, POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC, FOR OTHER SERIOUS HEALTH CASES.

IT IS ENCOURAGING TO LEARN THAT THE NEW FACILITIES HAVE RECENTLY BEEN USED TO SAVE THE LIVES OF A FEW SNAKE-BITE VICTIMS.

PROCURING VACCINES, A PROCESS

AS WE LOOK FORWARD TO FINDING SOLUTIONS TO ENDING THE PANDEMIC, VARIOUS COUNTRIES HAVE DEVELOPED SEVERAL VACCINES. WE CONGRATULATE THEM AND WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT THESE WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE WHOLE WORLD, AS CORONAVIRUS KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES.

WE HAVE ALREADY INSTRUCTED GOVERNMENT TO ACQUIRE THESE VACCINES FOR OUR PEOPLE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THE PROCESSES OF ACCESSING THEM HAVE BEEN PUT IN PLACE. HOWEVER, IT MAY TAKE A WHILE AS THEY ARE NOT EASILY AVAILABLE. THEREFORE, WE ARE STILL MAKING CONCERTED EFFORTS TO FINDING THE RIGHT VACCINE THAT WILL REALLY DEAL WITH THIS PARTICULAR PROBLEM.

THIS IS A CRITICAL TIME FOR COUNTRIES TO WORK TOGETHER TO CURB THIS PANDEMIC AND SUPPORT THE REBUILDING OF OUR ECONOMIES. IT HAS BEEN PROVEN THAT NO COUNTRY CAN SUCCEED ALONE SO THE VERY STRONG PARTICIPATION OF OTHERS, WHETHER DEVELOPED OR UNDERDEVELOPED, IS VERY IMPORTANT.

MY COVID-19 ENCOUNTER

WHILE WE AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF THESE VACCINES, I WISH TO SHARE THAT THERE IS TREATMENT THROUGH THE USE OF AN ANTI-VIRAL DRUG, WHICH IS VERY USEFUL IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE PANDEMIC.

WE DISCOVERED THIS MEDICINE AFTER I TESTED COVID-19 POSITIVE FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS ON THE FIRST WEEK OF JANUARY 2021. I AM GRATEFUL TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON TAIWAN FOR SENDING THROUGH THIS MEDICATION TO HELP TREAT ME.

I DO BELIEVE THAT MY TESTING POSITIVE WAS TO BRING TO LIGHT THE DISCOVERY OF THIS TREATMENT. I DID NOT ANNOUNCE IT THEN BUT WHEN I INTENDED TO MENTION IT, I DISCOVERED THAT I WAS NOW NEGATIVE.

WE HAVE INSTRUCTED GOVERNMENT TO IMMEDIATELY PROCURE THIS DRUG, AS IT HAS REMARKABLE SUCCESS BY PRODUCING A RECOVERY IN A SHORT SPACE OF TIME.

HOWEVER, THE PROTOCOL OF THE DRUG REQUIRES THAT YOU TAKE IT FOR 10 DAYS WHILE THE PRACTISE FOR COVID-19 SAYS, BE ON MEDICATION FOR TWO WEEKS.

I THEREFORE, REMAINED IN HOSPITAL AFTER THE 10 DAYS TO SATISFY THE DOCTORS THAT EVERYTHING WAS OKAY, AND WE THANK GOD THEY FOUND THAT I HAD FULLY RECOVERED.

EMASWATI MUST SEEK THIS DRUG AS SOON AS ONE DISCOVERS THEY ARE POSITIVE. THERE HAVE BEEN IMPRESSIVE REPORTS OF A HIGH RECOVERY RATE AMONG THOSE WHO WERE TREATED WITH THE DRIP AT AN EARLY STAGE.

IMPORTANCE OF INCWALA CEREMONY

REGARDLESS OF THE FACT THAT THERE WAS A COVID-19 PANDEMIC, WE WERE ABLE TO CELEBRATE INCWALA AND EMASWATI CAME OUT IN THEIR NUMBERS TO ATTEND THIS CELEBRATION. IT IS ONE EVENT THAT WE CANNOT MISS.

WE HAD IT IN MIND NOT TO MAKE IT ONE OF THE SUPER SPREADER EVENTS, BUT WE THANK GOD THAT THE OUTCOME DEMONSTRATED THAT IT CONTRIBUTED MORE TO THE FIGHT AGAINST THE PANDEMIC.

THOSE WHO ATTENDED HAD TO GO THROUGH SCREENING AND TESTING TO ENSURE THEY WERE NOT CARRIERS OF THE VIRUS. IN THE PROCESS, A NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO WOULD NOT HAVE KNOWN THEIR STATUS, DISCOVERED SOONER THAT THEY WERE INFECTED WITH THE VIRUS AND WERE IMMEDIATELY TAKEN TO HEALTH CENTRES FOR TREATMENT. MANY HAVE SINCE RECOVERED.

THEREFORE, WE CAN CONFIDENTLY SAY INCWALA CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19. WE ARE GRATEFUL THAT MANY PEOPLE ATTENDED, AND WE CELEBRATED INCWALA VERY SUCCESSFULLY.

REVIEWING 2022 TARGET

COVID-19 HAS SET US BACK ON OUR DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMMES. WE HAVE A SET AGENDA OF REACHING 2022 AS A FIRST WORLD COUNTRY.

THE YEAR 2020 PRESENTED US WITH NUMEROUS CHALLENGES FROM EARLY IN THE YEAR DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ADHERING TO THE ECONOMICALLY STIFLING REGULATIONS THAT HAD TO BE PUT IN PLACE.

WE ARE NOW IN 2021 AND THERE ARE NO CLEAR SIGNS, AS YET, THAT WE ARE GOING TO MAKE MUCH PROGRESS WITHOUT ELIMINATING COVID-19. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, POSITIVE SIGNS THAT IT IS BEING BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL.

SINCE WE EARMARKED THE YEAR 2022 AS THE YEAR TO ATTAIN FIRST WORLD STATUS, IT IS CLEAR THAT WE ARE NOT GOING TO REACH THIS TARGET. WE HOPE IT WILL NOT TAKE US TOO LONG TO GET BACK ON TRACK AND ATTAIN IT.

IT IS NOT EASY TO EVEN IMAGINE WHICH WILL BE THE RIGHTFUL YEAR TO SET AS OUR NEW TARGET WHILE WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF FIGHTING THIS OUTBREAK AS WE HAVE NO IDEA WHEN IT WILL ACTUALLY END.

NEVERTHELESS, WE HAVE TO CHART A WAY FORWARD. WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT THIS YEAR WILL BE ONE IN WHICH WE CAN DECLARE THAT THIS OUTBREAK IS OVER.

IMPACT OF COVID ON BUSINESS AND JOBS

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON BUSINESS HAS BEEN SEVERE. MANY COMPANIES HAVE CLOSED, OTHERS HAVE DROPPED IN PERFORMANCE AND LOST PROFITS, FORCING THEM TO RETRENCH STAFF EVEN BEFORE THE WORKERS COULD DEVELOP THEMSELVES TO STAND ALONE.

BUSINESS START-UPS ALSO PROVED DIFFICULT WITH POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS FORCED TO STAY HOME. THEREFORE, MUCH NEEDS TO BE DONE TO REALISE ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND IT HAS TO START WITH ENSURING THAT WE SUCCESSFULLY CONQUER THE PANDEMIC AND DECLARE OUR EFFORTS AS A MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. I TRUST THIS WILL NOT BE LONG FROM NOW.

GOVERNMENT'S FISCAL POSITION

THE GOVERNMENT REVENUE LOSS AND HIGH EXPENDITURE AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC IS BEYOND MEASURE AS NO ONE CAN PROJECT ITS LAPSE.

RECENT ECONOMIC PROJECTIONS REFLECT A CONTRACTION OF THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY. NONETHELESS, THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF A REBOUND BENEFITTING FROM RECOVERY IN MONETARY OUTPUT.

AS A COUNTRY, WE ARE ALREADY ON A MONETARY CONSOLIDATION COURSE TO TRY AND CONTAIN THE DISTRESS IN THE ECONOMY AND WE ARE COMMITTED TO A FISCAL ADJUSTMENT PLAN (FAP). TO MAINTAIN MACRO-ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY, A SIZEABLE PLAN WILL BE IMPLEMENTED OVER THE MEDIUM TERM.

THIS WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, TARGETING TO REDUCE EXPENDITURE AND IMPROVING REVENUE COLLECTION.

HOWEVER, IN THE CURRENT YEAR WE WERE FORTUNATE TO GET FINANCING FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND AND THE WORLD BANK TO FULLY FINANCE THE BUDGET. ACCESS TO THESE FUNDS HAVE MADE A MAJOR POSITIVE IMPACT IN CLOSING THE MONETARY GAP AND REDUCING ARREARS.

SUSTAINING HEALTHY RESERVES AND REDUCING SPENDING

DESPITE THIS DIFFICULT PERIOD, WE ARE ENCOURAGED THAT THE COUNTRY'S RESERVES HAVE REMAINED STABLE. THE EXPECTATION WAS THAT THEY WOULD BE A LOT FURTHER DOWN, BUT GOD HAS BEEN ON OUR SIDE.

THIS WILL ALSO BE A TOUGH YEAR SO WE WILL HAVE TO BE VERY CAUTIOUS WITH OUR SPENDING AND BE VIGILANT IN OUR FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION, PARTICULARLY WITH THE UNCERTAINTY OVER THE LIFESPAN OF THE PANDEMIC.

GOVERNMENT SHOULD CONTINUE ENSURING THAT THE ECONOMY DOES NOT COLLAPSE AS WE HAVE WITNESSED IN OTHER COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD. SOME HAVE DECLARED AN INABILITY TO FINANCE THEIR BUDGETS. ONLY A PROPERLY MANAGED FISCUS AND CAREFULLY GUARDED RESERVES WILL ENSURE ESWATINI AVERTS SUCH A SITUATION.

WE SHOULD BEAR IN MIND THAT NOT MANY ECONOMIES ARE GROWING DUE TO THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF THIS PANDEMIC. THIS WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO BE EXTREMELY GENEROUS TO OTHERS.

WE NEED TO BE PROFICIENT BY ACHIEVING MORE WITH LESS IN THE USE OF GOVERNMENT RESOURCES IN ORDER TO ATTAIN MACRO-ECONOMIC STABILITY, ACCELERATE ECONOMIC GROWTH, CREATE JOBS, RAISE INCOMES, PROVIDE FOR THE WELFARE OF THOSE LESS PRIVILEGED AND REDUCE POVERTY.

LET US INCREASE OUR EFFORTS TO CURB CORRUPTION AND TAKE PUNITIVE MEASURES AGAINST THOSE WHO WILL NOT WORK WITH US IN MAINTAINING HEALTHY RESERVES.

CAPITAL PROJECTS CRITICAL FOR INVESTMENT

AS WE SET OUT ON OUR RECOVERY PATH, SHARP FOCUS HAS TO BE DIRECTED AT PROMOTING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO ATTRACT INVESTORS DESPITE THE RESTRICTIVE COVID-19 REGULATIONS.

THE COUNTRY WILL THUS CONTINUE TO PRIORITISE AND SUPPORT EFFORTS TOWARDS INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEDIUM TERM, WITH FOCUS BEING ON PROJECTS WITH HIGHER MULTIPLIER EFFECTS FOR RESILIENT ECONOMIC RECOVERY.

AMONG THESE IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A 300MW COAL FIRED THERMAL POWER PLANT AT LUBHUKU. THE NATION WILL BE PLEASED TO HEAR THAT IT IS TECHNICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY VIABLE.

GOVERNMENT SHALL ENSURE THE COMPLETION OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY AND THAT FUNDS ARE SECURED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FACILITY THIS FINANCIAL YEAR.

OTHER STUDIES FOR ALL INFRASTRUCTURAL PROJECTS, INCLUDING A REFERRAL HOSPITAL, ARE NEAR COMPLETION AND SHALL CONTINUE AT THE REQUIRED PACE. WE WILL ALSO LOOK TO CONSTRUCTING NEW FACTORY SHELLS TO ENHANCE LOCAL AND FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTOR ATTRACTION.

IT IS EVIDENT THAT COVID-19 HAS GIVEN US ALL ENOUGH TIME WHILE AT HOME TO COME UP WITH INNOVATIVE WAYS TO STRATEGISE ON HOW BEST WE CAN SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER IN MAKING THINGS BETTER FOR OUR KINGDOM.

IN THE PROCESS OF NOT BEING ABLE TO ATTEND MANY ACTIVITIES, I, ALONGSIDE EMASWATI, HAVE ALSO BEEN DOING A LOT OF RESEARCH FOR IDEAS FOR OUR ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN.

LET US PUT THESE TO ACTION FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL, PARTICULARLY OUR YOUTH.

APPLAUDING FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

WE WANT TO THANK COMPANIES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANISATIONS, COUNTRIES AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS THAT HAVE BEEN VERY SUPPORTIVE DURING THIS MOST DIFFICULT TIME.

WE HAVE RECEIVED TECHNICAL EXPERTS TO SET UP OUR FACILITIES, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENTS (PPE's), MEDICAL EQUIPMENT, MEDICINES AND HEALTH EXPERTS, TO ASSIST US WITH OUR EFFORTS.

THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, CORPORATES AND INDIVIDUALS, LOCALLY AND FROM OUT OF OUR BORDERS, HAVE ALSO CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS OF MONEY TO THE COUNTRY WHICH HAS ENABLED US TO COPE TO THIS DAY.

THERE ARE MANY OTHER ORGANISATIONS WHICH ARE TOO MANY TO MENTION HERE, THAT ALSO MADE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS OUR RESOURCE MOBILIZATION, AND TO WHOM WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL.

THIS SUPPORT HAS BENEFITTED OUR PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITIES WITH FOOD AND HOUSEHOLD NEEDS. WE DO BELIEVE MANY EMASWATI CAN SAY THEY WERE NOT NEGLECTED DURING THIS PANDEMIC AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO CARE FOR THEM EVEN NOW.

THE SPIRIT WHICH HAS BEEN DEVELOPED BY COVID-19 IS ONE OF SHARING AND SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER WHICH IS ENCOURAGING AND VERY NECESSARY IN SUCH TIMES.

WE DO HOPE THAT POST COVID-19, THIS SPIRIT WILL CONTINUE BECAUSE THIS IS THE WAY WE WILL OVERCOME ANY CHALLENGE COMING OUR WAY.

THE CONFRONTATION WITH COVID-19 HAS GIVEN US MANY LESSONS ON THINGS TO TACKLE FOR OUR STRUGGLING ECONOMY.

EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

IT IS PLEASING TO NOTE THAT, WE ARE ON A PATH TO MAINSTREAM CLIMATE ACTION BY ENHANCING EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS AND REDUCING EMISSIONS.

THE NATION WILL RECALL THAT, IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS WE EXPERIENCED ONE OF THE HEAVIEST FLOODS EVER SEEN IN RECENT TIMES. THEY CAUSED A LOT OF DAMAGE TO BUSINESSES, PROPERTIES, HUMAN BEINGS AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN GENERAL.

SOME PEOPLE WERE LEFT HOMELESS AND THESE ARE SOME OF THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE. GOVERNMENT SHALL PRIORITIZE THE DRAWING UP OF A NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLAN TO HIGHLIGHT RESEARCH AND NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR THIS CHALLENGE.

WE NEED TO INVEST MEANINGFULLY IN OUR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE, IN ORDER TO PROTECT PEOPLE AND ASSETS, THEREBY ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDG's).

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY IS THE CRITICAL PATH THAT THE COUNTRY HAS TO NAVIGATE SUCCESSFULLY IN ORDER TO ELIMINATE HUNGER AND ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH.

GOVERNMENT IS ALSO CONSIDERING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY PROGRAMMES THAT WILL SPEARHEAD THE ATTAINMENT OF BOTH HOUSEHOLD AND NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY.

THE NECESSITY FOR FOOD SECURITY AND SELF SUFFICIENCY BECAME EVIDENT DURING THE PANDEMIC. THE EXISTING SUPPLIES WERE UNABLE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR PEOPLE.

SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

WE ARE PLEASED THAT GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN THE COUNTRY.

SOME ACHIEVEMENTS IN THIS SECTOR INCLUDE THE MANZINI TRADE HUB, INFORMAL TRADERS REVOLVING FUND, LEATHER PRODUCTS AND PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS, TO MENTION BUT A FEW.

THE RECENT LAUNCH OF A E45 MILLION SME REVOLVING FUND WILL HANDSOMELY ASSIST TO REVIVE THEIR BUSINESSES FROM THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC.

HIV/AIDS

THE YEAR 2020 WAS A VERY SPECIAL ONE FOR THE COUNTRY FOR THE MILESTONE WE ATTAINED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS. ESWATINI BECAME ONE OF THE FIRST NATIONS IN THE WORLD TO REACH AND SURPASS THE SET GLOBAL TARGETS OF 95-95-95.

THIS MEANS THAT THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV IN THE COUNTRY KNOW THEIR STATUS, ARE ON LIFE SAVING TREATMENT (ARVS) AND ARE VIRALLY SUPPRESSED.

THIS IS A HIGHLY IMPRESSIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT AS IT IS 10 YEARS AHEAD OF THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY WHOSE TARGET IS 2030. WE EMBRACED THE CALL OF **“I-AIDS YINDZABA YETFU SONKHE”**.

THE COUNTRY HAS TAKEN INITIATIVE TO SET SYSTEMS IN PLACE TO FIGHT THE CHALLENGES OF HIV/AIDS. WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK OUR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, WHO HAVE STOOD WITH US TO ACHIEVE THIS. LET EVERYONE CONTINUE TO TAKE HIV AS OUR NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE SURE WE DO NOT REVERSE THE GAINS THAT WE HAVE ATTAINED.

CONCLUSION

MASWATI, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE PANDEMIC IS NOT YET OVER, WE ALL WISH IT WAS.

LET US HEED THE ADVICE OF GOVERNMENT AND HEALTH OFFICIALS ON HOW BEST TO CURB THE SPREAD OF COVID-19, SO AS TO PROTECT OURSELVES AS WELL AS OTHERS.

THEREFORE, PEOPLE MUST STAY AND WORK FROM HOME TO AVOID UNNECESSARY TRAVELLING. ONLY LEAVE HOME IF IT IS VERY IMPORTANT AND YOUR LIFE CANNOT DO WITHOUT IT.

AS WE DO SO, LET US REMEMBER THAT THE VIRUS STILL LURKS FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN FOR A THIRD OR EVEN A FOURTH WAVE. WE SHOULD NOT ALLOW IT.

TODAY WE ARE HERE IN PARLIAMENT TO OFFICIALLY OPEN THIS SESSION TO ALLOW FOR THE ENACTMENT OF ESSENTIAL LEGISLATION THAT WILL SUPPORT THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY.

WE TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WISH OUR PARLIAMENT SUCCESS IN BRINGING TOGETHER ALL MEASURES NECESSARY TO HELP THIS COUNTRY MOVE FORWARD AND DEVELOP IN LEAPS AND BOUNDS. THIS WILL ENSURE THAT THE FUTURE GENERATIONS FIND A COUNTRY THEY CAN BE PROUD TO CALL HOME.

NINE BEKUNENE, THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND ITS EFFECTS HAS BEEN A LONG AND PAINFUL JOURNEY. IT IS TIME TO HEAL OUR NATION, REBUILD OUR ECONOMY AND BRING STABILITY TO ALL OUR SYSTEMS THAT HAVE BEEN DISTURBED DURING THIS TIME. THE TASK THAT LIES AHEAD MAY SEEM DAUNTING, BUT IT IS NOT INSURMOUNTABLE.

WE HAVE NEW DREAMS TO LAUNCH AND NEW PLANS TO BUILD AS THE YEAR 2022 IS UPON US. WE HAVE A VISION TO EXTEND INTO THE NEXT DECADE. MOST IMPORTANTLY WE HAVE EACH OTHER, AS WELL AS OUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS, TO COUNT ON FOR SUPPORT AS WE CHART A NEW PATH FORWARD.

DECLARATION

IT IS NOW MY SINGULAR HONOUR TO DECLARE THE THIRD SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI OFFICIALLY OPEN.

I THANK YOU; MAY THE ALMIGHTY GOD BLESS US ALL!