STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF LESOTHO, AT THE HIGH LEVEL MIDTERM REVIEW OF THE ISTANBUL PROGRAMME OF ACTION, IN ANTALYA, TURKEY – 27 MAY, 2016

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Your Excellency, Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the Mind term Review,

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Your Excellency, President of General Assembly,

Your Excellency the President of the ECOSOC,

Your Excellencies Heads of delegations,

Honourable Ministers,

Members of the Civil Society,

Members of the Private Sector,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege for me, to address this august gathering that has the important task of reviewing progress made by the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in their endeavor to graduate out of their precarious status. I would like to thank the Government of the Republic of Turkey, through you Mr. President, for the excellent hospitality graciously accorded to me and my delegation, since our arrival in this beautiful city.
Mr. President, allow me, on the onset, to state that my delegation fully endorses the Statement delivered earlier on behalf of the LDCs.

I am hopeful that this meeting will afford us an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come since the Istanbul conference five years ago, and also to share experiences, and work closely together to chart the way forward in ensuring that more countries graduate out of the Least Developed status.

Mr. President,

In the case of my country, Lesotho, I wish to inform you that the Government is making a concerted effort to lift our country out of the LDC status. This is being done through the implementation of the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP), which incorporates the resolutions reached at the Fourth UN Conference on LDCs held in 2011. The coming into being of the Istanbul Programme of Action coincided with the development of the NSDP. It was therefore imperative to integrate, in our national priorities, the internationally agreed vision and strategies contained in the Istanbul Programme of Action.

Significant progress has been made in Lesotho's effort to graduate out of this category, though we still face challenges that continue to limit our productive and absorptive capacity, growth in our export base; adequate trade and investment flows, as well as eradicate our health care challenges.

Based on the internationally agreed graduation criteria, efforts have been made to improve different performance in the areas that have been identified. These include, but are not limited to, Lesotho’s Gross National Income per capita, which is above the graduation threshold. It is nonetheless much lower than the income-only graduation threshold of
$2,484. The country’s Gross National Income per capita is also lower than the LDCs average.

As a strategy to drive sustainable development, the Government is actively engaging the private sector in formulating and implementing strategies that will drive economic development and sustainable job creation. We have redoubled our efforts to improve the investment climate and improve our national competitiveness in key sectors including agriculture, mining, manufacturing and services sectors such as tourism and construction. We continue to receive invaluable support from our development partners including the World Bank, WTO and UN agencies, to mention a few. We are also working closely with our bilateral partners on these issues.

Mr. President,

With respect to human development, our performance, at 62.9, is higher than the LDCs average of 51.5. Literacy rates have been improving over time through the introduction of free and compulsory primary education, a high level of secondary enrolment and adult education. Furthermore, the Government of Lesotho, through the Ministry of Education and Training, has developed a Curriculum and Assessment Policy aimed at harnessing and developing the necessary skills that are better aligned to our economic strategy.

In the case of the Under-5 mortality rate, there has been a significant decline from 117 per 1000 live births to 85. One of the major factors that could be attributed to this positive development is the improvement in immunization coverage and child nutrition. As you will agree with me, improved universal health care is critical for achieving a positive impact on productivity and overall economic development.
Mr. President,

Our economy is yet to grow to the desired level. Currently we have textiles and footwear as major exports in addition to diamonds and water. Lead times to main markets for our products and sourcing of inputs from distant suppliers, still pose challenges. Lesotho is land-locked, and this continues to undermine our export competitiveness in international markets. Nevertheless, we have embarked on a number of initiatives, such as customs modernization and harmonization, as well as simplification of Customs rules and procedures to facilitate trade and improve overall ease of doing business.

Like our neighbors in Southern Africa, we are experiencing a severe drought that has led us to declare a state of emergency in the recent past. This has led to increased food prices thereby risking our food security situation particularly among the vulnerable sections of our society.

Mr. President,

It is our fervent hope that the United Nations, development and trading partners will continue to support our efforts towards meeting graduation targets with concrete actions and adequate financial resources.

Mr. President,

May I conclude by mentioning that Lesotho is in the process of reviewing its National Strategic Development Plan. This offers us the opportunity to further streamline our strategies, to ensure synergies with new global perspectives; which include Sustainable Development Goals, The African Union Agenda 2063, Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) and the outcome of the review of the Istanbul Programme of Action.
I THANK YOU.