During the Third United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC3) in Awaza, Turkmenistan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations of Lesotho, Honourable Lejone Mpotjoane, delivered a National statement outlining the country’s aspirations and priorities. The conference presented an opportunity for nations to increase efforts to support LLDCs in overcoming structural challenges that hinder economic growth and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and other goals in the Pact for the Future. The discussions at the conference coincided with the start of the implementation decade for the Sevilla Commitment, which Lesotho hopes will complement the commitments made in the Awaza Programme of Action (APoA).

In his statement, the Honourable Lejone Mpotjoana highlighted that Lesotho has identified key areas of focus for the successful implementation of the APoA’s five priority areas and deliverables:

* Agriculture and Food Security: Lesotho, recognising agriculture as the economic backbone of many LLDCs, strongly supports the creation of Regional Agriculture Research Hubs. These hubs are seen as crucial for tackling sustainable agricultural practices and innovations to enhance food security and reduce poverty. Lesotho has announced its interest in hosting such a center for the Africa region, noting that agriculture is a priority sector for economic growth and job creation in its National Strategic Development Policies. The country’s commitment to improved food security and nutrition in Africa is further demonstrated by His Majesty King Letsie III’s roles as the African Union Champion of Nutrition and FAO Ambassador for Nutrition.
* Infrastructure and Connectivity: Lesotho supports the establishment of an infrastructure investment finance facility for LLDCs. This facility would complement national initiatives like Lesotho’s new Inclusive Growth Fund, which aims to de-risk private investments and use diaspora contributions to address infrastructure financing challenges. The proposed facility would mobilise resources through a combination of concessional finance, grants, and blended finance to promote economic growth and support cross-border connectivity and trade corridors.
* Renewable Energy: With its rich potential in hydro, solar, and wind, Lesotho sees renewable energy as a way to transform its economy and strengthen regional energy security. The country has launched the “Just Energy Transition Initiative” to attract investment that aligns with its climate and energy goals. In line with APoA commitments, Lesotho is calling for increased financing and support for clean energy production in LLDCs and is urging the private sector, governments, and financial institutions to pursue innovative financing and partnerships.
* Trade Facilitation and Integration: The country faces challenges with regional integration, connectivity, and complex transit and border requirements. Lesotho and its neighbour, South Africa, are working to improve transit facilities and enhance border efficiency by establishing Smart One Stop Border Posts. A Joint Action Plan of Implementation was signed two months prior to the conference to facilitate seamless trade and tourism between the two countries. To address trade barriers and integration challenges, Lesotho is requesting support for a special program under the WTO to ensure the full integration of LLDCs into the multilateral trading system.

Under the previous Vienna Programme of Action, Lesotho had made progress in trade facilitation, infrastructure, and digital connectivity. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate shocks revealed the country’s fragility and highlighted the need for resilient systems and diversified economies. Lesotho continues to grapple with structural challenges such as high transport costs and limited access to seaports, and recent geopolitical developments threaten to reverse the export competitiveness it had gained over two decades. In light of these challenges, Lesotho is open to partnerships with developed countries and development partners to implement projects that address its structural issues.