

**Statement by Ms Nomathemba Dlamini, Principal Secretary
Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Kingdom of
Swaziland to the 43rd Session of the Committee on the Rights of
the Child, Geneva, 18th September 2006**

Mr Chairperson,

On behalf of the Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, I wish to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude for having been invited to the 43rd Session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. It is an honour and privilege for me to present the initial State Party Report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for the Kingdom of Swaziland as well as the follow-up response thereto. The report is a result of joint efforts between stakeholders, which include Government, Non-Governmental Organizations, Community-based organizations, and the UN agencies. It was fully participatory and consultative, in particular the children who are the prime beneficiaries under the CRC.

Mr Chairperson,

The Kingdom of Swaziland is currently faced with the HIV and AIDS pandemic, which is one of the most unprecedented challenges the country has ever experienced. According to the 2004 sentinel surveillance report, the HIV prevalence rate among women attending antenatal care clinics in the country is 42.6%. The ugly face of the pandemic is its devastating effect on children, with the number of orphans and vulnerable children currently projected at well over 70 000 children and this figure is projected to reach

120 000 by the year 2010. Closely linked with the HIV and AIDS pandemic is the high level of poverty that the country is also facing. Current statistics stand at an alarming rate of 69%. The situation on the ground reflects that children are the most affected and that their rights are greatly compromised, economically, legally and socially by the prevailing circumstances.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland has fully committed itself in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Over the last 5 years, Government gave priority to the reduction and ultimately the elimination of vulnerability of children. In line with our policy of “putting children first” and “children are our future,” Government commissioned the drafting of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (PRASP). During the preparation of the Strategy and Action Plan, it was realized that there was an urgent need to cut the poverty cycle by addressing priority needs for orphans and vulnerable children. Hence, in 2002, priority was given to the preparation of the project on Social Protection of Vulnerable Children (SPVCO) including orphans 10-18 years. In order to implement this project, Government mandated the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to establish the Children’s Coordination Unit and allocated a sum of ten million Emalangeni (E10,000.000) for the operationalisation of the project.

This project adopted a holistic and rights-based approach by taking into consideration and reviewing a child’s life from all angles of life. This was to ensure the protection, promotion and fulfillment of children’s rights, which include, access to education, health care, food security and nutrition,

community care, legal protection, and prevention of abuse and promoting a sense of belonging for all children in Swaziland.

Mr Chairperson,

Subsequent to the production of the CRC report, in July 2005, the Government of the Kingdom Swaziland finalized and adopted the Constitution as the supreme law of the land.

Contained in the Constitution is the Bill of Rights, which guarantees the protection and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals on the basis of equality. The Constitution further presents us with an opportunity to address most of the children's rights issues previously not covered in the country's legal framework and in the initial CRC State Party report. For instance Section 29-31 specifically addresses children's rights to the extent of abolishing the status of illegitimacy.

Embodied in the Constitution is the Human Rights Commission, which Government will be establishing soon to effectively implement as well as to ensure that human rights of all citizens including those of children are promoted, protected and fulfilled.

The Constitution also makes a provision for free education of all children at least up to the end of primary level within three years of its commencement. As a starting point, since 2003 Government has been providing grants to orphans and vulnerable children. In 2005 these grants supported 65,548 orphans and vulnerable children. Further, the Ministry of Education in 2005 completed the Universal Primary Education Plan and began implementing it

by expanding the previous provision of primary school textbooks and school meals in Lubombo and Shiselweni region.

Mr Chairperson,

The country has embarked on a wide scale reformation of its laws to comply with the Constitution and the various international legal instruments that it is party to. This involves the amendment of the Administration of Estates Act of 1902, the Marriage Act that places the marriageable age at 18 and the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act of 1938, which establishes Children's Courts.

In addition to the constitutional developments, Government with its partners and stakeholders has embarked on a project towards developing comprehensive draft legislation on Children and Sexual Offenses as well as on Domestic Violence. The objective of these is to protect the rights of the child and improve the welfare of all the children in the country.

Also, Government and her partners have developed a children's policy, which has been tabled before Cabinet and it is envisaged that it will be adopted before the end of the year.

Mr Chairperson,

In recognition of the growing numbers of the children with disabilities, Government has sanctioned a National Survey of all forms of disabilities in the country. It is anticipated that the findings of this survey will inform national interventions in order to address the needs of the children living with disabilities.

Mr Chairperson,

Government has adopted the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) for 2006 to 2010, which was launched by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland in April 2006. This plan was developed through an extensive consultative process and took into consideration the participation of children and their views. The Action Plan adopted a human rights-based approach aimed at “developing and implementing an integrated safety net system that will deliver care and support packages for children at the household level.”

In response to the growing number of orphans and vulnerable children

Communities have launched initiatives, which include the following;

- Lihlombe Lekukhalela at Community level
- Lihlombe Lekukhalela –Child Protectors in School
- Neighbourhood Care Points (NCPs)
- Indlunkulu

Mr Chairperson,

In order to reduce morbidity and mortality amongst children, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare has devised a strategy for reaching every child in the country with a basic child survival package in line with the CRC. The package includes- immunization; Vitamin A supplementation; regular de-worming; provision of insecticides treated bed nets in malaria endemic areas; and the Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission plus (PMTCT).

As part of its effort to ensure child survival, Swaziland committed itself towards the elimination of polio. Consequently, it has been certified as a polio free country.

Mr Chairperson,

The Swaziland Centre of Excellence, which was launched by His Majesty the King, Mswati III early this year provides treatment, care and support for HIV and AIDS-infected children and their families as well as the provision of PMTCT services.

Mr Chairperson,

Having said all these, Government recognizes the need to strengthen its information systems and to improve and build capacity on statistical data capturing, analysis and reporting to ensure that we reach out and meet the needs of all children in a well coordinated fashion.

In conclusion, Mr Chairperson, the Kingdom of Swaziland is committed to the implementation of the CRC. The Decentralisation Policy adopted in 2005, will allow for the utilization of traditional structures and institutions, the active involvement of communities, civil society and the youth to ensure the protection, promotion and fulfillment of children's rights in Swaziland.

I thank you Sir.