

**MISA LESOTHO PRESENTATION, BY TOM MAPESELA, AT THE
GENDERLINKS AND MISA GEM SUMMIT – INDABA HOTEL, GAUTENG,
SOUTH AFRICA – SEPTEMBER 12 TO 14, 2004**

I. GMBS SYMPOSIUM RESOLUTIONS

A report of the GMBS Lesotho plan of action was produced at the end of the National Symposium. The specific action areas, which were part of MISA Lesotho's initiative, alongside the regional organisation, to mainstream gender issues into our strategic partnership programme and hence workplans, included, but were not limited to the following:

- **To build the capacity of media women's associations, media monitoring projects, where they exist, and non-governmental organizations to monitor the media more consistently and thoroughly for gender perspectives, biases and stereotypes, and to use this information for effective lobbying of the media for change;**
- **To enable media women's associations, media monitoring projects and non-governmental organizations to mainstream gender into their own information and communications work;**
- **To develop gender and media research capacity in the Southern African countries to identify problem areas and strategies for closing the gender gaps;**
- **To build the awareness of the public, as media consumers, of gender and media issues, etc.**

II. PRESENTATION OF GMBS KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the GMBS for Lesotho were then presented at the sixth meeting of the Press Club of Lesotho, by the chief researcher in charge of the Lesotho findings, Professor Yosiah Bwatwa of the National University of Lesotho. The sixth press club meeting was also used to formally introduce a newly established NGO, the Media and Arts Watch Association (MAWA) Tšireletso, which is involved in the monitoring of media and arts activities from a gender sensitive perspective. The press club meeting was held in September 2003. Subsequent to this, promotional material, bearing messages on gender equality, was produced and distributed to the Ministry of Gender as well as to the wider stakeholding. The sensitisation messages were in both Sesotho and English.

Following this, the findings, alongside the ASK and Speak Out campaigns, were further reiterated during the four day Morija Arts and Cultural Festival that was held in October 2003. Together with the Ministry of Gender, MISA Lesotho erected information desks to sensitise the people on the importance of the right to information and the creation of a gender equilibrium, coupled with the reversing of associated stereotypes in that regard. Summaries of the Lesotho GMBS report were also

distributed to members of the public to heighten awareness. During the four day period of the Festival, MISA Lesotho also bought radio slots to further transmit our message to the masses and to inform them of our Chapter's efforts at the Festival itself.

In conjunction with the UN agencies in Lesotho, during last year's 16 days of activism against gender based violence, our Chapter organised a media march from the UN House to the MISA Lesotho Media Resource Centre, to heighten awareness on issues of gender based violence as well as the adverse impact of the faceless HIV/AIDS epidemic on our society. The march was held on November 28, 2003 and preceded the 7th meeting of the press club of Lesotho. The meeting began with a candle lighting ceremony and a moment of silence in commemoration of the lives of the victims of gender based violence and HIV/AIDS.

III. MONITORING PRINT MEDIA REPORTS

Having forged links with the Media and Arts Watch Association (MAWA), in May this year, MAWA held a meeting of stakeholders at the Victoria Hotel in Maseru. The meeting was aimed at mapping out the way forward in conformity with the work of the national NGO. MAWA is a partner of, among others, Genderlinks and MISA Lesotho. The organisation works closely with MISA Lesotho alongside our chapter's gender mainstreaming programme.

The meeting came up with thematic working groups in the areas of monitoring media reports for insensitive language use in areas of HIV/AIDS, gender equality, gender based violence, theatre and drama, etc. MISA Lesotho was allocated the responsibility of spearheading deliberations of the working group for monitoring insensitive language use in media reports on issues of gender equality, gender based violence and HIV/AIDS.

The MISA Lesotho-led working group met on Friday May 28, 2004 at the MISA Lesotho Media Resource Centre and set out mechanisms for weekly monitoring print media reports in the outlined categories. The reports can individually be obtained on the MISA website: www.misa.org under the Lesotho chapter link. This initial initiative will conclude in December with the production of an analytical report to be circulated to stakeholders for further deliberation and sensitisation at an envisaged stakeholders' forum, to be convened later this year. The media report monitoring strategy conforms to the guidelines set by the Reporting Gender in Southern Africa: A Media Guide, formulated and compiled jointly by the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC), Women in Development Southern Africa Awareness (WIDSAA) and the Zambia Institute of Mass Communication Education Trust (ZAMCOM). The initiative also conforms to the Gender and HIV/AIDS Training Manual for Southern African Media and Communicators, which was done by Genderlinks and the AIDS Law Project Centre for Applied Legal Studies.

The Monitoring has, to date, revealed that media practitioners lack adequate understanding to report on HIV/AIDS in an objective and sensitive manner. A typical example is that, in reference to the HIV/AIDS condition, practitioners tend to say disease, whereas the proper reference should ideally be condition. Another example is

the tendency to report that people die of AIDS, whereas in actual fact they die of AIDS related illness.

Furthermore, the media reports monitoring initiative has also revealed a trend whereby women in media reports are portrayed as timid and more often than not, they are portrayed as secondary stakeholders in the society. In one write-up, where the author reported that government officials hardly ever want to see media practitioners if and when such a need arises, the author uses the words: “When the man at the top is too busy, or finally when he is through with his meetings.” This on its own shows that in the author’s mind, those who are supposed to hold key positions in governmental institutions and presumably anywhere else, are men.

IV. MAINSTREAMING GENDER INTO WPFDC

On May 3, 2004, the Chairperson of MISA-LESOTHO, Mr. Thabo Thakalekoala, delivered the official statement for Lesotho at the Hotel Victoria in Maseru, at the opening of a workshop on HIV/AIDS reporting that was held by the Media and Arts Watch Association and sponsored by Genderlinks.

The celebrations for this year in Lesotho came to a climax on the last day, which was Saturday May 8, 2004, a memorable day indeed, where many activities took place in the peri-urban areas of our capital, Maseru.

The celebrations were held at Nazareth, a community some forty kilometres out of Maseru. Upon arrival at Nazareth, media practitioners and MISA Lesotho members began the 2004 FIVE KILOMETRE WALK FOR PRESS FREEDOM, which began at a place called Ha Ntsi, ending at Ha Motjoka football ground where most activities were set to take place. The activities included a marathon cross-country race, a fifteen kilometre rough terrain bicycle race, soccer matches, drama, songs, live music, a barbecue, as well as the dissemination of information on pertinent issues, to sensitise the Nazareth community on HIV/AIDS and gender equality issues, as well as to sensitise them on the general scope of the work of MISA Lesotho. This was in a bid to lobby the community to facilitate MISA Lesotho’s work of sensitisation and advocacy, not only in Nazareth, but across the Kingdom of Lesotho as a whole.

The National University of Lesotho (NUL) Theatre Group performed a most informative drama on the importance of HIV testing. While all this was going on, there were four information desks situated around the performance areas, where people could go and ask various questions regarding the work of MISA Lesotho, the importance of the media and judicial protection, the importance of knowing their HIV/AIDS status as well as the importance of gender equality and advocating for a society that is free from gender based violence and outdated gender stereotypes that exacerbate and do not bridge the existing gender gap in our society.

The Nazareth community was also presented with various HIV/AIDS material to keep them informed, as well as being provided with a summarised version of the Lesotho Constitution and various material of MISA Lesotho, outlining the importance of the ASK campaign, the Speak Out Campaign, the Gender and Media Baseline Study as well as other material pertaining to a free media and freedom of expression.

V. CONCLUSION

The pinnacle of MISA Lesotho's gender mainstreaming activities for this year, with the exception of gender sensitisation workshops, is undoubtedly the monitoring of print media reports for insensitive language use in issues of HIV/AIDS, gender based violence and gender equality. This, I must add, is done with the joint facilitation of our cooperating partners, who have already been cited in this short, but rather objective and most informative presentation.

In conclusion, allow me to indicate that modalities for guidelines to monitor progress and development of indicators for this monitoring exercise will be addressed following the consolidation of the individual reports into one working document. The working document will be presented at a forum of stakeholders to be held later this year. The forum will be aimed at presenting the key findings of the exercise before stakeholders, in order that they may formulate the necessary indicators to measure progress. This media report monitoring initiative may seem small, but dynamite also comes in small packages and it will ultimately go a long way in infusing positive change in reports on HIV/AIDS, gender based violence and gender equality, surfacing from the media fraternity of Lesotho.