

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY THE SENATE PRESIDENT-SENATOR LINDIWE
DLAMINI, AT THE SECOND ANNUAL SENATE RETREAT ON 21st APRIL, 2021 AT
THE SIMUNYE COUNTRY CLUB**

Bantfwabenkhosi;

Bobabe Tikhulu;

UNAIDS Country Director

NERCHA National Executive Director

The Honourable Deputy Senate President;

Honourable Senators;

Clerk to Parliament, representative;

Resource Persons;

Distinguished guests;

Senior Government Officials;

Pastor Mabuza

UNAIDS AND NERCHA Staff members;

Parliamentary Staff;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a particularly great honour for me to welcome you all to this second annual Senate Retreat. This year we decided against conducting our Retreat in a vacuum, we have included a theme that highlights some of the issues that continue to besiege us. The theme for our Retreat this year is; ***“Sustenance of Parliamentary HIV/AIDS Intervention in the face of Covid-19.”***

May I also on behalf of all Senators take this opportunity to wish His Majesty King Mswati III a belated birthday. You are a gift to the Nation. We will work hard as Emaswati to give you a gift of peace.

I would like to start by acknowledging the generous support that we received from our partners who have made hosting this Retreat possible. I therefore, extend our sincere gratitude to UNAIDS, NERCHA, AMICAAL AND ROYAL ESWATINI SUGAR ASSOCIATION (RESA). It is through such valued partnerships that our country can develop in a positive direction. Your contribution does not, and will never go unnoticed. Before I continue, may I on behalf of Senators, wish His Majesty the Ingwenyama – King Mswati III a happy belated birthday. Long Live Your Majesty.

I would also like to appreciate all the Principal Secretaries and other Government representatives, Private Sector representatives, and members of the United Nations family who have agreed to take time out from their busy schedules to be with us for the next three (3) days. I have no doubt that we will have a very productive Retreat.

It would be very inappropriate for me not to thank all of you Senators for attending in your numbers. Last year was a very difficult year globally. The most difficult part for us as Senate was losing two (2) Senators. We have quickly dusted ourselves, knowing that the best way to honour them is by diligently executing on the mandate that was given to us individually and collectively by “The People” in 2018. The sad loss has not only been limited to the loss of our colleagues alone; we have experienced pain in more ways than one due to the loss of our loved ones. We will continue to soldier on.

Hon. Senators, ladies and gentlemen, not all was doom and gloom during the Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament. The proverbial “lemonade” we made from all those lemons has been encouragingly sweet and serves as a testament of our resilience in the face of adversity. The year 2020 made us very innovative and consequently we were able to embrace technology in how we conduct some of our meetings. These initiatives were also made possible as a result of our important relationships with development partners such as the UNDP. As we speak, the Standing Orders Committee is in the final stages of preparing a draft of amended Standing Orders.

Our theme this year reminds us that while we have won so many battles, the war is not yet over. As a country, we attained a very important milestone - like the 95-95-95 strategy; that is, 95% diagnosed among all people living with HIV, 95% on antiretroviral Therapy among diagnosed, and 95% virally suppressed among treated. We cannot afford to be complacent, we have to continue to work hard in the mist of changing environments. Our intervention on HIV/AIDS issues has to be sustained even as we deal with the COVID -19 pandemic. We are privileged that our Partners are here to take us through that journey. We will inter alia, be looking at the Socio Economic Analysis during COVID - 19 and Aids Pandemic, Ending the HIV and AIDS epidemic, and the Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026. I sincerely hope that these topics will be the catalyst that will transform the way the respective Committees conduct their business.

Hon. Senators, this Retreat has become a very important resource in equipping us to make more effective legislation, exercise oversight over the Executive, and to represent the people better. The Retreat is also a tool that we use once Government Policy for the Session has been delivered by His Majesty the King through the “Speech from the Throne” when inaugurating a Session of Parliament. The Speech from the Throne will be the spring board through which we will be able to look back and map a way forward. We will recap on the challenges and success of the First Session, review the Second Session, and then Plan for the Third Session. Most importantly, this year, we have included topics that will empower us in running our very own personal affairs. Being a Senator is not about just occupying a position of power but it is about having an obligation to improve the lives of all Emaswati.

Lastly, I would like to declare my excitement and optimism that this Retreat will be a very successful one. We will leave this place as changed Senators. I encourage all of you to participate fully during the interactive sessions in the next three days. With those few words, I would like to declare this meeting officially open.