TEXT OF WELCOME REMARKS BY HON. ERIC MOLALE, MINISTER FOR PRESIDENTIAL AFFAIRS, GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POVERTY ERADICATION

...Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to welcome you this morning to this official opening of the International Conference on Poverty Eradication.

Let me begin by extending a special welcome to our distinguished delegates who have come from outside Botswana, including our brothers and sisters from the SADC region, to be with us today. I trust that you will enjoy your stay in our country.

In this respect it is my hope that many of you will find time outside this conference to explore what our country has to offer in terms of its unique natural and cultural heritage as a premier tourist destination. If you are unable to find time to experience the wonders of the Okavango, Chobe or Makgadikgadi in our north, at least let us guide you to some of the sites closer to Gaborone.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a Government and people we feel honoured to host this historic conference; which we believe is the first gathering of it’s kind to specifically focus on the theme of leaving “No One Behind” in the global struggle to end poverty since World Leaders made a commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

The convening of this conference is, therefore, a collective demonstration of our commitment to join hands in making “No Poverty” a reality.

Our theme - “Leave No one Behind: The Fight Against Poverty, Exclusion and Inequality” - is most appropriate as it is aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.
It is in this global context that I believe your participation at this conference will go a long way in contributing to our global collective effort in fighting extreme poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
The assembly of professionals from across the globe who have vast experience in the implementation of poverty eradication programmes will enrich the deliberations and discussions at this conference.

I am therefore confident that the conference will produce tangible results which will undoubtedly contribute immensely to our efforts to eradicate poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The attitude that “there will always be poverty” or “Poverty can never be eradicated” are no longer acceptable. It is for this reason that the Government of Botswana has responded positively towards Poverty Eradication through various programmes.

The need for an inclusive approach to tackling poverty as a cornerstone of Governance is, in fact, rooted in our founding national principles of Democracy, Development, Self-Reliance, Unity enriched by our indigenous concept of Botho, which speaks to our shared humanity.

Botho refers to one of the Tenets of African culture. It is a concept of a person who is well rounded in character, well mannered, courteous and disciplined. Botho defines a process for earning respect by first giving it. Botho encourages social justice for all. Caring for your neighbour as you would care for your family.

Over the years these higher national principles have been cascaded into our principles of planning, which are based on the need to promote Social Harmony through a Sustainable Development path that achieves Rapid Growth and Economic Independence, while ensuring Social Justice.
It is on the basis of these overarching principles that we have come up with various policies, programmes and initiatives over the years to address poverty. These have included agricultural and social programmes such as the Integrated Support Programme for Arable Agriculture and Development, the Livestock Management and Infrastructure Development, the Self-Help Housing Agency subsidies, Poverty Eradication Programme, Youth Empowerment Scheme and Women Empowerment Programme, amongst others.

In addition, the provision of relatively free education and health care services, food at schools, programmes for the orphans and destitute persons have also made a positive contribution to uplifting the lives of Batswana.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Botswana has made progress towards eradicating extreme poverty as evidenced by the declining percentage of people living below the poverty datum line. We have, however as Government, taken a position that there are no tolerable levels of poverty.

It is for this reason that our President, His Excellency Lt. General Dr Seretse Khama Ian Khama in his Inaugural Address of 2009 identified Poverty Eradication as one of his flagship programmes.

As per our Constitution’s provision of term limits, His Excellency will be stepping down as Head of State at the end of this month. This is in keeping with our uninterrupted tradition of peaceful transfers of power.

In this context we also find it fitting to now hold this conference in his honour in recognition of his own personal efforts to create a society in which all of our citizens can enjoy the Dignity of sharing in the wealth of our land.

This conference should enable us to build on his legacy by completing the path he has charted.
Before I conclude my remarks, let me once more welcome our distinguished visitors to Botswana and wish you a productive and successful conference.

I thank you for your attention.