

Keynote Address for the Botho University Virtual Graduation, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Minister of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology

(Hon.) Dr. Douglas Lethsolathebe

SALUTATIONS

It is a great honour for me to be part of this historic virtual graduation ceremony. Let me first start by commending the class of 2019 for your commendable achievement. I also thank your parents, families, guardians and indeed faculty for their support, sacrifice and patience endured during your period of study. Your achievement is because of the collective efforts of all these people who encouraged and supported you to reach this critical stage of your academic journey.

We have never imagined that one day, the world would be riddled with such a pandemic as we are battling today in the name of COVID-19. The pandemic has had so many effects on world economies and Botswana is no exception. You would all be aware that the diamond industry is still a critical driver of growth, currently being the largest contributor to government revenue. The expected reduction in activity is likely to result in growth contraction in 2020. It is therefore important that as you enter the industry, you need to reflect on the roles you can play to assist the government and the people of Botswana to recover from the effects of COVID-19.

There is no doubt that the pandemic has a lot of dark side such as market turbulences, pressure on the health sector and possibilities of loss of jobs. However, there is also a brighter side to this challenge, and I wish to urge you to focus more on the brighter side and opportunities presented by the virus. Some of the opportunities include more time in the advent of cancellations of major events and gathering. This time can be used to reflect on our habits and routines to adopt new modes of adaptability. Such modes include virtual meetings which are shorter and more effective, work from home, among others. The other brighter side to COVID-19 is the opportunity to innovate and be creative. A lot of organizations suffer from slow procedures, bureaucracies and rigid hierarchies making productivity a farfetched idea. The pandemic has forced many of them to break through these rigid systems and act swiftly in decision making.

It is therefore an exciting moment to be graduating at such times as these ones where the world is yearning for more answers to address the challenges posed by Coronavirus. I am confident that Botho University (BU) has adequately prepared you for the challenges that lie ahead. I am reliably informed that BU has a firm focus on student employability, with everything they do evolving around producing a globally employable, entrepreneurial graduate with the knowledge, skills, competencies and attitude to drive productivity growth and value creation in our economy. The University's graduate profile, commonly known as ~~and~~ Botho Graduate

Profile (BGP) engenders to produce a Botho Graduate that has imbibed critical 21st Century Skills such as being articulate, innovative, entrepreneurial, collaborative, critical thinking, hardworking, ethical, confident, socially responsible and environmentally responsible, in addition to of course their core disciplinary knowledge. All the programmes are practical, industry focused and have built in semester long internships and compulsory entrepreneurship and computing training. The years you have spent here have helped you to be an industry-ready graduate.

Let me conclude my remarks by commending Botho University for the efforts and contributions towards government effort to fight the virus. Botho University has made a total contribution of P1, 742.500.00 of which P150, 000.00 was in cash and the rest in kind. Most of the contributions in kind was devoted to provision of free online training for Teachers, Trainers across various education levels i.e. Primary, Secondary and Tertiary. This was meant to help capacitate stakeholders to transition to online teaching and learning delivery. This is highly commendable, and my government has made note of such efforts.

It is also worth noting that while leveraging on the the gains in distance learning for campus learning, the same technologies used for the distance learning campus were implemented for campus learning students during the CVOID-19 lockdown. Every campus learning student was enrolled on the University's virtual learning environment called Blackboard Learn and given material and support through that

system like distance learning students to augment the face-to-face experience. I am told that Blackboard Learn is a cloud-hosted solution that works off a web browser and provides a number of features designed to support teaching and learning, including file sharing features, discussion boards, wikis, online assessment and feedback features, amongst others. Through this feature, BU students benefited from learning without having to physically be on campus.

I learn that there are around 698 graduates who will be virtually receiving various academic awards this morning. This is a commendable job not only to the graduates themselves but to Botho University, more so that some of the students are graduating in post graduate studies.

I once more wish to congratulate you for the wonderful achievements you have and challenge you to go out there and find ways of connecting and helping address societal challenges.

Pula! Pula! Pula!