



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS
AT THE GABORONE DEMOCRACY LAB 2025**

THEME "Democratic Institutions Must Deliver Again!"

BY

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A very good morning to you all.

1. I stand before you this morning with deep humility, and a profound sense of both duty and hope.
2. Duty — because we gather in a time that calls for courage. Hope — because this gathering, this *Democracy Lab*, reminds us that even in moments of turbulence, the human spirit continues to seek light.
3. Across the world today, democracy is under strain. Everywhere we look — from the north to the south, from east to west — we see the same uneasy winds: conflict and displacement, economic inequality, mistrust in institutions, and the rise of populism and disinformation.
4. It is what some have called *a polycrisis* — a storm of many storms —
each one feeding into the other, shaking the foundations of governance,
and testing the resilience of nations.
5. But as history teaches us, crises often reveal not just our fragility, but also our capacity to rebuild.

They remind us that democracy, though imperfect, remains the most powerful idea humanity has ever offered itself — an idea that insists every life, every voice, and every conscience has equal worth.

6. That is why we are here — to reflect, to renew, and to act. Just eleven months ago, in November 2024, Botswana crossed a historic threshold.

For the first time in fifty-eight years of independence, we witnessed a peaceful change of government.

7. A change achieved not through conflict, not through upheaval —
but through *the ballot*,
through *the will of the people*,
through *the spirit of democracy itself*.

And for that, we are deeply humbled.

8. Our nation's story in that moment was not about political victory or defeat —
it was about the maturity of our people,
the strength of our institutions,

and the quiet triumph of the democratic ideal.

9. Yet this change also compels us to look inward.

It reminds us that the true test of democracy does not end at the polling booth —

it begins the morning after the election.

10. Our citizens are asking harder questions now:

They ask — *what is the meaning of democracy if it cannot put food on the table?*

They ask — *what is the use of freedom if it cannot deliver fairness and opportunity?*

And we must answer.

11. I recall the words of a Pan-African scholar, Ken Opalo - who once said:

“You cannot eat democracy.”

It is a sobering truth — not a rejection of democracy, but a plea to make it work.

Across Africa, and even here in Botswana, citizens are not losing faith in democracy —

they are losing faith in the *performance* of democracy.

12. They are saying:

“We have our rights — but we need results.”

“We have our vote — but we need voice.”

“We have promises — but we need delivery.”

13. That, colleagues, is why this Lab’s theme — *Democratic Institutions Must Deliver Again* — is so timely.

14. Because it asks us to confront the heart of the matter:

**Can our institutions still serve? Can they still inspire?
Can they still deliver the promise of dignity?**

15. The *Afrobarometer* data that informs this Lab offers us an honest mirror.

It shows declining trust in governments.

It shows widening inequality.

It shows young people — the majority of our population — feeling alienated from decision-making.

16. But it also shows something beautiful:

that even in frustration, our people still believe in democracy as a moral compass —
they just want it to mean more.

17. They want a democracy that feeds their families.
That educates their children.
That protects their freedoms and their futures.
18. They want a democracy that is not just a ritual — but a relationship.
Not just an election — but a covenant of trust between the state and the citizen.
And that, my friends, is what we must rebuild.
19. As Botswana navigates this new chapter — under a new government, in a restless world —
we recognise that democracy does not exist in isolation.
The global economy, the climate emergency, regional instability — all these shape our democratic space.
20. Our task, therefore, is not only to preserve democracy —
it is to make democracy *perform* in this new world.
21. To ensure that freedom and development walk hand in hand.
That human rights and human needs are not opposing forces,
but allies.
That the rule of law and the rule of reason guide our progress.

22. Our vision, in the New Botswana, is to make Botswana the best-managed economy in Africa — a nation that stands as a paragon of unity, fairness, and inclusive prosperity.
23. BETP and NDP 12 are our blueprints to getting to our *true north* under this new democratic dispensation — *a high-income Botswana that is digitally enabled, export-driven, and economically diversified where every citizen is employed, empowered, and fulfilled.*
24. This is not just an economic goal — it is a democratic one. For democracy, too, must be managed well — efficiently, ethically, and inclusively.
25. Allow me, therefore, to commend Friedrich Ebert Stiftung — and its Botswana office — for transforming into the Democracy Hub of Africa.
26. In years past, the FES has shown it's support for the notion that for democracy to make sense to our people, it must deliver tangible benefits beyond electoral activity only. We recognise, and commend you for such past studies, and, to mention but three as follows:

- a) Are Diamonds Forever (2014)* with BIDPA and University of Botswana: to explore alternative pathways for Botswana's diamond led development;
- b) Youth Insights into Botswana (2024)* : to explore the perspectives of our young people into how democratic dispensation may better improve our health systems, transportation, economic diversification and other important issues of development.
- c) Challenging the Youth Democratic Disconnect through Pockets of Democracy (2025)* that gives context, meaning and urgent need for youth agency to secure our democracies.

- 27. I mention some of these studies to recognise the important role FES plays in producing evidence to support and build capacity for our democratic institutions. I also mention these to encourage FES to continue to render such support, and proffer our gratitude.
- 28. Director of ceremonies, it is a monumental responsibility — and an opportunity to shape the next generation of democratic thought on our continent.
- 29. I have studied the programme for this Lab.

I have seen the range of sessions — from the *Fishbowl on Democracy at Risk* to the *Thought Lab* and *Democracy Futures Pitch*.

30. I am particularly struck that this Lab is not designed for speeches alone — but for *co-creation*.

For the convergence of data, dialogue, and design.
For the coming together of politicians, civil society, journalists, academics, trade unions, and youth —
not as adversaries, but as partners in the grand experiment of democracy.

31. This is democracy at work —
diverse voices, divergent ideas, yet united by one purpose:
to make our institutions deliver again.

32. If our institutions are to deliver, they must first *transform*.

We must reimagine governance so that:

- **Citizens are co-creators**, not spectators.
- **Accountability is the norm**, not the exception.
- **Digital tools** expand access, not control.
- **Public service** becomes a calling, not a career.
- **Integrity and transparency** are not slogans, but the everyday culture of leadership.

33. This is what it means to make democracy *fit for purpose* in the 21st century.
34. We cannot defend democracy with nostalgia — we must defend it with innovation.
35. Africa's democratic renewal will not come from imported blueprints.
It will come from the wisdom of our own experience — from the heartbeat of our people.
36. We have lessons to learn, yes — but we also have lessons to offer.
37. We have shown the world how to conduct peaceful transitions.
How to mediate conflict with dialogue.
How to blend modern governance with traditional authority.
38. We must now show the world how democracy and development can reinforce one another —
how dignity and prosperity can belong to the same sentence.

39. Let Africa rise again, not merely as a continent of potential, but as a continent of principle.

Let us build a democracy that is truly African in wisdom — and universal in its justice.

40. So, as we embark on this Lab, I invite each one of you — scholars and activists, policy-makers and dreamers — to do three things.

First, *listen deeply.*

Listen to the evidence. Listen to one another. Listen to the silent hopes of those whose voices are seldom heard.

Second, *act boldly.*

Translate your insights into reforms, into movements, into institutions that work.

And third, *sustain relentlessly.*

Let us build systems that outlast our politics, that remain faithful to the people even when leaders change.

41. For democracy, if it is to mean anything, must endure beyond applause.

It must survive beyond the headlines.

It must live in the daily experience of justice and dignity.

42. Eighty years ago, in the ashes of war, nations gathered and founded the United Nations.

They did not gather because they were strong — they gathered because they were broken.

They gathered because they believed that dialogue could save humanity from itself. – *ntwa kgolo ke ya molomo*, a Setswana saying goes.

43. Today, as democracy trembles under new pressures, we must gather with that same conviction.

44. Let this *Gaborone Democracy Lab* be our renewal point — our generation's reaffirmation that dialogue, evidence, and empathy are still the instruments of progress.

45. Let us leave here not only with debates and data, but with the determination to make democracy deliver — again, and always.

46. Let our continent's next chapter be written not in despair, - but in the confident handwriting of a people who refuse to surrender the dream of freedom.

47. May our deliberations this week rekindle that dream.
May our institutions regain their strength.
And may democracy, that fragile yet enduring flame,
continue to illuminate the path of Africa — and of Botswana
— for generations to come.

48. **I thank you.**