

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Swaziland launches 50/50 campaign ahead of local elections**

*Ezulwini, 9 October* –Increasing the representation of women in politics and decision-making is an opportunity to improve the quality of governance and also the right thing to do, as women constitute more than 52% of the population. This is the key message of government and international representatives that spoke yesterday at the launch of the 50/50 campaign at Royal Swazi Spa Convention Centre in Ezulwini, Swaziland.

Launched by the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Clifford Mamba this week, the campaign aims to bring to attention of the public and the Constituency the need to increase women in local government and build momentum towards the national elections to be held in 2013. Local Government elections in Swaziland will be held on 3 November 2012.

The 50/ 50 campaign is being led by Gender Links (GL) Swaziland in partnership with the Deputy Prime Minister's Gender and Family Issues Unit, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Swaziland Local Government Association (SWALGA) and the Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV/ AIDS in Africa (AMICAALL).

With 49% women in local government, Lesotho has the highest proportion of women in any area of political decision-making in SADC. Projections for local government show that by 2015 there will be 35% women in local government across Southern Africa, but this varies considerably in the 15 member countries.

Of the 80 outgoing Urban Local Authority councillors, there are only 15 women councillors (18.8%). This is below the 30% target stipulated in the Swaziland Constitution and the 50% target in the SADC Gender Protocol on Gender and Development. The local elections in Swaziland will be the last before 2015 – the deadline for the SADC Gender Protocol and MDG 3. Swaziland ratified in September 2012.

The campaign slogan is "From 30% to 50/ 50: Women and men in politics and decision-making."

Speaking to more than 100 delegates who attended the launch, Mamba pointed out that the electorate needs to nominate women to contest in the forthcoming local government elections and also vote for them should Swaziland achieve 50% representation of women and men in politics and decision making by 2015. He said that the fact that the government has ratified the Protocol shows that there is political will towards women's empowerment.

Karibu Masimu, the UNDP Deputy Representative in Swaziland stated that the reality of attaining the 50/50 representation hinges on the upcoming election and requires all stakeholders to get the message out and engage women through the campaign.

"There is nothing legal that prevents women for participating in politics. We need to talk to women and convince them to participate in elections," said Nonhlanhla Dlamini, the Director in the Deputy Prime Minister's Gender and Family Issues Unit.

The Chief Executive Officer for Mbabane City Council, Gideon Mhlongo also added his voice in support of the campaign. He said that women should view local government as an opportunity for them to build networks and their confidence as well as acquire experience for national level participation. He cited the example of Sibongile Mazibuko who started off as a councillor in Mbabane and has moved to national politics.

Grace Bhembe, a former councillor and only female councillor in Mbabane City Council is standing for reelection. She concurs with Mhlongo and further noted that for women to demonstrate that they are capable of leading councils and change the lives of communities, they need to be given a platform. That platform is only guaranteed if they are voted for.

Gciniwe Fakudze, the Matsapha City Council Chief Executive Officer pointed out that men do not caucus to constitute 90% of decision-makers. She said women should do the same and be confident in themselves. "Women are their own enemies, they do not support each other and those who have made it do not want to mentor the young ones," she added.

Faith Manana, an *induna* at *tinkundla* local government in Mbabane West, declared during the launch that she will stand for national elections in 2013.

Mamba also launched the **SADC Gender Protocol Barometer 2012** and applauded the Southern Gender Protocol Alliance for the monitoring tool that assists government to measure progress.

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