**PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Disability stakeholders reaffirm calls to abolish penal code amendment at LNFOD Coalition meeting**

**Maseru, 20 April 2012:** Stakeholders from different organizations involved in the disability sector came together to discuss they key issues faced by people with disability in Lesotho at the Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled (LNFOD) Coalition Meeting and held on Wednesday (18 April) at the Lesotho Sun.

The meeting was attended by the Mathuso Likoti, the Deputy Principle Secretary from the Ministry of Justice, and Mahlapane Makakula Moliba, the Chief Rehabilitaton Officer from the Department of Social Welfare as well as representatives from 18 disability groups and institutions in Lesotho including the Lesotho Society of Mentally Handicapped People (LSMHP), Autism Lesotho, Lesotho National League of the Visually Impaired (LNLVIP), National Association of the Deaf in Lesotho (NADL) and the Lesotho National Association of the Physically Disabled (LNAPD).

The key issues discussed were the amendment of section 45 (b) of the penal code, which permits the premature termination of a pregnancy if the child is at risk of having a severe mental or physical disability, and the progress of the domestication of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

The Deputy Principle Secretary offered a presentation on the rationale behind the amendment of the penal code, whilst various stakeholder groups expressed their disappointment at not having been consulted over the decision to amend the act, repeating calls for the act to be abolished on the basis of a breach of the human rights of people with disability.

“On behalf of all people with a disability in Lesotho, LNFOD advocates that the decision regarding section 45 be overturned,” commented Nkhasi Sefuthi, Human Rights Advocacy Officer of the Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled.

“Section 45 is the ultimate discrimination against people with disability, taking away the right to be born if there is the potential for a child to have a severe disability. The government should instead focus on strengthening its education program on prenatal care to prevent disability occurrence and establish early identification and intervention services to support and educate new parents of children with disabilities.”

The workshop continued with a presentation from the Chief Rehabilitation Officer, Department of Social Welfare on the recently adopted National Disability Policy and the progress of the domestication of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD), which was ratified by the Lesotho government in December 2008. The convention is the first legally binding international agreement that protects the human rights of people with disabilities. The convention is currently pending domestication, or conversion to local law, without which the treaty may not legally be enforced.

This presentation came one day after Mothejoa Metsing, Leader of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy, promised to domesticate the UNCRPD as soon as possible if he were elected Prime Minister. He also pledged to help mobilize resources to fund sign language interpreters on Lesotho TV in his capacity as an individual. These commitments were made during a meeting with disabled persons groups, held at the offices of NGOC Lesotho on 17 April 2012.

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