



## **Lesotho – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 21 June 2012**

### **Lesotho: Politically-related violence in 1998.**

The 2012 *Freedom House* report on Lesotho states:

“Parliamentary elections in 1998, although judged free and fair by international observers, set off violent protests after the results gave the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) party 79 out of 80 constituency seats with just 60.5 percent of the vote. Troops from South Africa and Botswana – under the mandate of the 14-country Southern African Development Community (SADC) – were summoned to restore order.” (Freedom House (14 June 2012) *Freedom in the World 2012 – Lesotho*)

A *Xinhua News Agency* report states:

“Lesotho army tuesday morning dispersed groups of youths from opposition parties, who attacked civil servants, causing panic among commuters going to work, said reports reaching here from maseru, capital of lesotho. the protestors seized government vehicles in maseru and forced civil servants driving to work to abandon their cars. the situation has been brought under control after the army intervention. army trucks are patrolling the streets of maseru and groups of police officers were stationed at strategic points along the main streets, said the reports.” (Xinhua News Agency (15 September 1998) *lesotho troops disperse protestors in maseru*)

An *Agence France Presse* report states:

“Southern African intervention troops secured a key military base here Wednesday after a pitched battle with Lesotho soldiers, officials said, and then moved into the violence-racked town centre in a bid to halt a wave of looting and arson. Correspondents said the sound of gunshots still reverberated through the beleaguered capital as night fell, though the sound of shelling from the hill where the barracks are sited, which had been incessant since the troops arrived on Tuesday, had ceased. Torched buildings burned unattended as troops patrolled the streets, while looters played cat-and-mouse with them. South African armed forces spokeswoman Colonel Lavern Machine told AFP the intervention soldiers, in Lesotho at the request of Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili following months of unrest in the wake of disputed general elections in May, had ‘secured all objectives.’ One of the chief objectives had been to secure the two military bases, Ratjemose and Makonyane, which had been under the control of junior military officers since they staged a mutiny against their seniors on September 11.” (Agence France Presse (23 September 1998) *Intervention troops secure ‘all objectives’ in Lesotho*)

A *Los Angeles Times* report states:

“The scene at the border crossing here on the outskirts of Maseru, the capital, was a mix of outrage, resignation and desperation as the South African-led military operation whose stated goal was to soothe this country's seething problems instead pushed it further toward chaos and collapse. Late in the day, immigration and customs offices were empty, the bureaucratic tasks taken over by South African and Botswanan soldiers with rifles and armored vehicles. On the South African side, Lesothans without visas were carted off to a refugee camp in nearby Ladybrand, where they waited as the plumes of dark smoke from burning homes and businesses in Maseru colored the horizon. Those with proper credentials scurried to make plans to go somewhere--anywhere--as they recounted tales of armed thugs in the streets and general panic as hundreds of looters emptied the shelves of downtown stores and businesses in a country where large numbers of the population are armed even during peaceful times. ‘Don't go up that road--the criminals are taking advantage of the situation,’ said Adu Boansi, a rental car company employee who was waiting with his wife and three children for a ride to South Africa. ‘This place has become a dangerous place to live.’ South African officials, while confirming nearly 50 dead from both sides and continued resistance by soldiers not loyal to the government of Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili, said the situation had improved by late Wednesday and promised to step back once the fighting stopped.” (Los Angeles Times (24 September 1998) *Hundreds Flee Fighting in Lesotho*)

See also *Agence France Presse* report which states:

“Violence sparked by the arrival in Lesotho of a southern African intervention force spread Thursday to the countryside, where towns and villages have been plundered and burnt. The banditry that has left the capital Maseru in ruins spread to outlying areas as the intervention force said it faced a new threat -- from dissident soldiers who fled to the hills with heavy weaponry after being routed from their bases. A meeting aimed at restoring the Lesotho military command ousted in a mutiny by junior soldiers on September 11 began Thursday morning, meanwhile, at Ratjemose military base here, which was captured soon after the intervention force entered Lesotho on Tuesday. Reports of deaths and injuries have been received from Teyateyang, a town 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of here, after an attack by dissident soldiers and opposition supporters. Unconfirmed reports said the town of Mafiteng, 88 kilometres (55 miles) to the south, had been burned out in the same manner as Maseru was on Tuesday and Wednesday, when arsonists and looters went on the rampage. Lesotho police commissioner Bolutu Makoba confirmed looting was occurring in Mafiteng and nearby Mahales Hoek. ‘Our hands are full and we can't be in all the places at the same time,’ he said.” (Agence France Presse (24 September 1998) *Lesotho violence spreads to countryside*)

An *Associated Press* report states:

“Hundreds of businesses were pillaged in three days of chaos and violence that occurred when about 1,000 soldiers from neighboring South Africa and Botswana poured across the border to quell a military mutiny. In some neighborhoods, only about one in five buildings is intact. Lesotho, a mountainous kingdom of 2 million people surrounded by South African territory, was poor before the looting. Now, the nation and its people are devastated. Lawrence Ramashamole walked the streets Friday looking for a

pickup truck to bring home the body of his brother, who he said was only doing his duty by guarding the Katse dam for Lesotho. 'Why did they have to kill him?' he asked. 'He wasn't a rebel.' Lesotho's government requested the intervention two weeks ago amid a revolt by junior military officers and strikes that paralyzed the capital, Maseru. The mutineers apparently sided with opposition parties that claimed the May elections swept by the ruling Lesotho Congress Party were rigged. South Africa, as the region's dominant economy and military power, expected to go in quickly, establish order and leave. But its troops were unprepared for the opposition they found when they rumbled in Tuesday. Eight South African soldiers and 58 Lesotho troops died. About 150 rebels from the Lesotho army reportedly were under arrest." (Associated Press (25 September 1998) *Clash Leaves Lesotho Devastated*)

An article published by *The Journal* states:

"The intervention followed seven weeks of anti-government protests and a revolt by junior Lesotho military officers, who sided with opposition parties who claimed elections last May - swept by the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) - were rigged. After repeated attempts at a negotiated solution and the rejection of a controversial report by southern African constitutional experts which found small irregularities in the election but did not recommend a new poll, Home Affairs Minister Buthelezi ordered military action, after receiving a request by the ruling LCD. Until now, the local Basotho people have accepted South Africa's influence and economic support, but have been determined to remain independent in order to keep their monarchy. But now, the intervention has now swung popular opinion against South Africa. The military operation went wrong from the moment the first 600 South African troops drove across the border in armoured vehicles. The force was too small to handle the unexpectedly well-organised resistance from members of the Lesotho army and armed loyalists of opposition parties. As south africans struggled to take control of the strategic Katse dam, part of a South African water project supplying the neighbouring Free State and the Makonyane barracks, they left a power vacuum in the capital, Maseru. Looters rampaged through the commercial centre setting buildings alight. South African military leaders later gave their troops shoot-to-kill orders to suppress mutineers in the capital." (The Journal (2 October 1998) *SA bungle Lesotho intervention: Mandela's leaving party has been marred by South Africa's disastrous handling of unrest in neighbouring Lesotho*)

An *Agence France Presse* report on violence at a rally in October 1998 states:

"Two more people have died following the outbreak of violence at a Lesotho government rally at the weekend, bringing the death toll for the incident to three, hospital sources here said Monday. The two young men died Sunday night from severe head injuries, Dr Piet McPherson, the superintendent of the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Maseru, told the SAPA news agency. He said another man who had also sustained head injuries at the rally was in a critical condition. A man was beaten to death Sunday when a crowd attending the rally by the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) outside Maseru turned on group of youths they suspected of trying to plant a bomb at the gathering." (Agence France Presse (12 October 1998) *Death toll after Lesotho rally rises to three*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

### References:

Agence France Presse (12 October 1998) *Death toll after Lesotho rally rises to three*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 18 June 2012)

This is a subscription database

Agence France Presse (24 September 1998) *Lesotho violence spreads to countryside*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 18 June 2012)

This is a subscription database

Agence France Presse (23 September 1998) *Intervention troops secure 'all objectives' in Lesotho*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 18 June 2012)

This is a subscription database

Associated Press (25 September 1998) *Clash Leaves Lesotho Devastated*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 18 June 2012)

This is a subscription database

Freedom House (14 June 2012) *Freedom in the World 2012 – Lesotho*

[http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=4fd9a63d1a)

[bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=4fd9a63d1a](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=4fd9a63d1a)

(Accessed 15 June 2012)

The Journal (2 October 1998) *SA bungle Lesotho intervention: Mandela's leaving party has been marred by South Africa's disastrous handling of unrest in neighbouring Lesotho*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 18 June 2012)

This is a subscription database

Los Angeles Times (24 September 1998) *Hundreds Flee Fighting in Lesotho*

<http://articles.latimes.com/print/1998/sep/24/news/mn-26070>

(Accessed 18 June 2012)

Xinhua News Agency (15 September 1998) *lesotho troops disperse protestors in maseru*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 18 June 2012)  
This is a subscription database

**Sources Consulted:**

Freedom House  
Google  
Lexis Nexis  
Los Angeles Times  
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database  
UNHCR Refworld