



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

### **Lesotho: Reports on politically-related violence since 2008 and inability or unwillingness of police and State authorities to provide effective protection.**

The 2012 *Freedom House* report on Lesotho, in a section titled “Overview”, refers to events since the 2007 elections as follows:

“Opposition parties disputed the allocations, accusing the government of poll-rigging and gerrymandering, and called a general strike. The strike was halted after the SADC agreed to mediate, but the talks failed to formally resolve the dispute. In 2008, 43 by-elections were held, the results of which were also contested by the opposition. ABC supporters protested outside the office of the IEC, holding several workers hostage until the protest was broken up by police. In 2009, gunmen opened fire on Prime Minister Mosisili's house, but he escaped unharmed. Government officials and some journalists linked the assassination attempt to the ongoing election dispute, calling it a failed coup.” (Freedom House (14 June 2012) *Freedom in the World 2012 – Lesotho*)

A *US Department of State* background note on Lesotho, in a section titled “History”, states:

“On April 22, 2009, a failed assassination attempt was made on Prime Minister Mosisili at his residence. Two suspects were arrested in Lesotho, and seven suspects were arrested in South Africa. Those seven were handed over to Lesotho authorities on April 19, 2011, following a prolonged extradition process. The suspected mastermind and financier of the attempted coup is in South Africa awaiting his extradition process. The eight suspects (one died of natural causes in custody) are on trial, facing charges of murder, attempted murder, robbery, kidnapping, illegal possession of firearms, contravention of the Internal Security Act of Lesotho, and conspiracy to kill the Prime Minister.” (US Department of State (Bureau of African Affairs) (6 March 2012) *Background Note: Lesotho*)

An *Economist Intelligence Unit* report states:

“A three-day strike in mid-August, organised by a coalition comprising textile workers, taxi operators, local businesses and other pressure groups in Lesotho, prompted a harsh response by the police, leading to the death of one person. The organisers' demands were wide-ranging, but included raising minimum wages for textile workers from M900 (US\$122) per month to M2,020, making improvements to working conditions in the textile sector, ending the current freeze on government recruitment, carrying out an immediate review of taxi fares (operators want to enact a 100% fare increase) and providing more sponsorship for tertiary students. The demonstrations turned violent, reportedly after a group of protestors blocked the road leading to some of the textile factories. The police used water cannons and tear gas

to disperse the protestors and fired shots at them.” (The Economist Intelligence Unit (28 September 2011) *Lesotho economy: Strike prompts harsh response*)

An *All Africa* report on events prior to the May 2012 elections states:

“Lesotho has seen political violence flare ahead of May 26 elections, with the opposition claiming that dirty tricks have undercut their turnouts. Fifteen political parties and several independent candidates will fight for the country's 120 parliamentary seats, although the main battle will be between Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili's newly formed ruling Democratic Congress and his former party, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), which is now led by Mothetjoa Metsing. Lesotho, a nation of two million people completely surrounded by South Africa, had their last general elections in 1998, which degenerated into looting and sparked a South African intervention. During April, three months after Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili broke away from the LCD, there were reports of intimidation and low-level clashes between rival parties. At least 10 people were seriously injured in the clashes. According to Lesotho Times, an angry Mosisili allegedly urged his supporters to fight back raising fears of more violent clashes.” (All Africa (21 May 2012) *Lesotho: Violence As Lesotho Starts Early Voting*)

An article published by the Lesothan newspaper *Sunday Express* states:

“The Lesotho Defence Forces (LDF) says it will ‘hit very hard’ people who instigate violence during the campaign period. The army issued the stern warning on Friday, a day after violent clashes between Democratic Congress (DC) and opposition supporters left 10 people injured and several cars damaged. The clashes started when a mob wearing Lesotho Workers Party, All Basotho Convention and Lesotho Congress for Democracy regalia stormed a DC rally in the Thetsane Industrial Area on Thursday afternoon. After the clashes DC leader, Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili, encouraged his supporters to retaliate if attacked.” (Sunday Express (undated) *Army threatens crackdown*)

A *Commonwealth News and Information Service* report on the May 2012 elections states:

“A team of Commonwealth observers to the 26 May 2012 Parliamentary elections in Lesotho have said the polls in the Southern Africa nation have so far been peaceful and credible. In an interim statement issued at a press conference by the Chair of the Commonwealth Observer Group, former Malawi President Dr Bakili Muluzi, on 29 May 2012 in the Lesotho capital Maseru, the Group said that ‘it is the view of the Commonwealth Observer Group that this election was conducted in a credible, transparent and professional manner.’ The Group said that the elections were competitive and that basic freedoms of association, assembly and movement were not compromised. Commonwealth observers however pointed out some areas that need improvement for future elections, including improvement of the voter register to make it more credible prior to the next elections, the use of government vehicles for election purposes other than for transporting ministers, breaches of the electoral code of conduct, isolated incidents of violence and bias of the state media.” (Commonwealth News and Information

Service (29 May 2012) *Lesotho: Elections Peaceful and Credible So Far, Say Commonwealth Observers*)

An *African Union* report, in a paragraph headed “General Observations”, states:

“The campaign was, on the whole, conducted peacefully, in spite of some minor incidents of intolerance and violence between supporters of some political Parties.” (African Union (28 May 2012) *Preliminary Statement of the African Union Electoral Observer Mission to the 26 May, 2012 National Assembly Elections in the Kingdom of Lesotho*)

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.

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