



ZAMBIA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

STATEMENT ON THE STATE OF THE NATION

A CALL TO SERVE THE PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA AS GOD WANTS

“Give a shepherd’s care to the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, as God wants; not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it.”

(1 Peter 5:2)

Our dear brothers and sisters in Christ and people of good will, peace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

1. PREAMBLE

We, members of the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), have dedicated ample time to reflecting on the current social, political, economical and environmental issues affecting the day-to-day living of the people of Zambia. First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge the good will of the government to bring about development to all corners of the country through the introduction of Free Education, increment of Constituency Development Fund (CDF), employment of health, education, police service, correctional service, defense forces, immigration personnel and many others.

However, in a spirit of co-responsibility, we wish to express some of our concerns regarding the service delivery to the nation, especially to our political leadership and other stakeholders.

2. HIGH POVERTY LEVELS

Poverty and inequality levels in the country continue to rise and government needs to urgently address this. Zambia faces both high levels of poverty and inequality, even when compared to other countries in the region. Investment and impressive economic growth over the decade brought benefits to urban areas, but poverty in rural areas remains widespread.

3. MORAL DECAY

It is with deep sorrow that we notice a steady rise in cases of child sexual abuse, early child marriages, child labour, sodomy, Gender Based Violence, human trafficking, homosexuality, bestiality, suicide and abductions in Zambia. These are clear indications that moral standards among our people have drastically dropped. We therefore call upon security agencies to act

promptly. As a nation, we all need to put our heads together to bring these immoral activities to a halt. For us to achieve this noble objective we ought to uphold Christian and family values which are of paramount importance. The use of vulgar language in the nation especially through social media should be discouraged.

4. REGIONAL AND TRIBAL SENTIMENTS

The political situation in Zambia is still characterized by the continued politicking and trivializing of important national matters by political leaders at all levels. Regional and tribal sentiments still enjoy a centre stage in the country's political circles. There is need for a genuine, inclusive and democratic national reconciliation in the country where political leaders ought to realize and appreciate the fact that their priority should be that of serving Zambians. The government should lead and be seen to lead the way in eliminating the "tribal" talk and sentiments in the country.

5. UNEMPLOYMENT

We note the fact that government has employed 30,496 teachers and 11,276 health workers. However, unemployment in Zambia continues to be a matter of concern and the government needs to urgently improvise practical strategies on how to deal with these high escalating levels. The truth of the matter is that government cannot manage to employ everyone; it is not just feasible and sustainable. Hence the importance to venture into serious support of SMEs, Small-Scale Farmers and opening of manufacturing industries in order to create more jobs. Further, we call upon the government to create an enabling environment for the already existing SMEs to thrive especially by paying them for services and goods supplied.

6. PUBLIC HEALTH

Health of the citizenry is cardinal to the productivity of a nation. It has been observed that health facilities in Zambia are lacking medicines to treat the population in many health institutions. The claim by the Ministry of Health that enough medicines have been dispatched to all health facilities cannot be substantiated as the information concerning the availability of medicines in both urban and rural health facilities does not correspond to the reality on the ground. In most cases, patients are given prescriptions to go and buy medicines from private pharmacies where they are very expensive and out of reach for the poor Zambians. We appreciate the establishment of NHIMA. However, its implementation leaves much to be desired and government is encouraged to look at its operation with the urgency it deserves. The revision of the procurement policy is also necessary in order to facilitate the acquisition of medicines and other hospital equipment.

7. FREE EDUCATION POLICY

The Free Education Policy is a welcome idea. However, the Free Education Policy has proved to have a negative bearing on the management of schools in general and grant aided (mission) schools in particular. The following are some of the gaps and challenges regarding the implementation of the policy.

Its implementation was rushed without preparing much needed room and desk-space for the overwhelming newly enrolled pupils. The number of teachers in schools has not changed much while pupil population has doubled or tripled making teacher-learner ratio disproportional. The current teacher recruitment did not target secondary school teachers where the FEP was also implemented. This is forcing many schools (especially Grant Aided Schools) to continue employing teachers on contracts. This is a strain on the limited resources of the schools in which the remunerations were paid by Boards or the scrapped PTAs and most of the capital projects that were being undertaken by Grant Aided Schools are now failing. Subsidies from the government are not enough and are usually restrictive.

8. LAND TENURE AND LAND SECURITY

The conflict between the idea of communal ownership of land under customary tenure and individual ownership under the leasehold tenure has continued being experienced and unfortunately, many people demean and undermine customary tenure system. Due to this situation, the country continues to face challenges such as selling of bare land, land displacements, land encroachments, land disputes and failure of women and other vulnerable people to access land.

It is our desire that the government puts in place deliberate measures to fully protect customary land administration systems without abrogating human rights. Individual rights over land should not override community interest.

9. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change effects have continued to undermine agriculture productivity in Zambia as evidenced by floods in the Southern Province and late coming of rains in the rest parts of Zambia and partial draughts in the previous rain seasons. Our appeal is that we combine our efforts in conscientizing our people on environmental protection and disaster preparedness.

10. AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

In the spirit of economic diversification, agriculture can play a big role in job creation both at small scale as well as large scale farming and can guarantee food security to society. Further, food security produces a wide range of positive impacts including economic growth, and poverty reduction. However, where farming inputs such as seed and fertilizers are not delivered on time and the harvest is not bought and preserved properly, both jobs and food security are compromised.

Unfortunately, even this farming season, we are grappling with farming inputs much to the dissatisfaction of the farmers. We therefore urge that the government delivers promptly the required inputs. In the same vein, we expect the government to buy what they can buy and secure them properly and also allow farmers to sell their extra produce to the international markets.

11. CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND (CDF)

We acknowledge the good intentions exhibited by government in increasing the threshold for Constituency Development Fund (CDF). However, there are challenges that need to be looked into in order to build an environment good enough to support the aspiration of the decentralization policy. Currently, the utilization of CDF seems to be so problematic due to bureaucracy necessitated by the CDF guidelines. Further, the powers given to the Member of Parliament with regard to the selection of CDF committee members defeats the purpose of making this fund apolitical. We therefore, demand that the CDF Act of 2018 be amended for the purposes of making sure that this fund is protected from being politicized. In the same breath, we urge the central government to build capacities of local governments to superintend CDF and making it more inclusive and corruption free.

12. CONSTITUTIONALISM

The need to re-look into the constitution and other pieces of legislation, such as the Electoral Process, Public Order Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Penal Code is long overdue. However, the Constitutional review process seems to be very slow. Up to now, there is no clear road map for constitutional, electoral and legislative reform agenda. Zambia's current constitution remains susceptible to regular alteration and politicization. Government should therefore guide in an open and transparent manner when and how the constitutional, electoral and legislative reform processes will be undertaken.

We are concerned with the manner some recent elections were conducted in Zambia. There are some recurring shortfalls such as political violence, tribalism, regionalism, political intolerance, lack of intra-party democracy, hate speech, name calling, bribery, polarization of the media and corruption. The perceived biasness by the Electoral Management Board (EMB) especially towards the ruling party has resulted in the diminishing public confidence in the Electoral Commission of Zambia. The way the recent Parliamentary By-elections in both Kabushi and Kwacha Constituencies on the Copperbelt, were conducted leaves much to be desired and a recipe for violence if left uncorrected. Both the Courts and the Electoral Commission could have done better.

13. RULE OF LAW AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

A country that adheres to the rule of law results in a society in which all persons and organizations including the government are subject and accountable to the law. This culminates into a court system which is independent and resolves disputes in an open and impartial manner. However, most of the problems affecting the justice sector and hinder people from accessing justice and claiming their rights include: corruption, inadequate personnel, poor funding, high cost of legal services, and lack of tools and equipment to carry out entrusted mandates among others. These challenges affect the judicial system and make it technically difficult for the ordinary and poor individuals to access justice and claim their rights.

Therefore, we demand that property trespassing, arbitrary arrests, detention and depriving of the accused of their property must be done within the confinements of the law and if not, these

should not be tolerated at all. We also condemn police brutality to our nationals (political opponents) as a way of treating those suspected to have broken the law.

14. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

We believe that policy pronouncements must be supported by affirmative actions and without that they end up making the fight against corruption incomplete and just a mere political rhetoric. So far, the Anti-Corruption Commission has seized a lot of properties including cash from some leaders who served in the previous Patriotic Front government. Apart from seizures there has been no conviction so far, making the fight against corruption appear as political persecution. Presently, corrupt practices have simply changed forms, shapes and sizes in the procurement of drugs, farming inputs, motorized transport, school requisites, by-elections and justice system among others. We demand that there be no sacred cows in the fight against corruption.

15. CADRISM

The political will to remove political party cadres from market places, bus stations and other public places has helped to restore sanity in the said places. However, a lot more needs to be done to completely arrest the situation, restore full order and sanity, and to ensure that every human being is free and safe to participate in democratic and governance processes. It is saddening to note that political cadres are slowly on the increase in market places and bus stations and have continued invading and harassing media houses and personnel. Further, they have continued to create havoc during by-elections. We demand that this trend be checked and arrested forthwith.

16. HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

There is need to look into the plight of immigrants and refugees in the country and especially our brothers and sisters from Rwanda and Ethiopia. We have also noted that there is a need to enhance minority rights and pass legislature that will protect the same. Nevertheless, minority rights cannot be equated with LGBTQIA+ promotion.

17. CONCLUSION

We invite all Zambians to preserve the peace and unity our country has enjoyed since the attainment of political independence by avoiding any form of tribal, political or religious discrimination. We invite everyone to work hard for a better Zambia and safeguard our national identity of One Zambia One Nation.

Signed:



Most Rev. Ignatius Chama,
Archbishop of Kasama and ZCCB President



18th November 2022

Rt. Rev. Charles Kasonde, Bishop of Solwezi / ZCCB Vice President

Handwritten signature: + Kasonde

Most Rev. Alick Banda, Archbishop of Lusaka

Handwritten signature: + Alick Banda

Rt. Rev. George Zumaile Lungu, Bishop of Chipata

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Rt. Rev. Benjamin Phiri, Bishop of Ndola

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Rt. Rev. Clement Mulenga, SDB, Bishop of Kabwe

Handwritten signature: + Mulenga

Rt. Rev. Evans Chinyama Chinyemba, OMI, Bishop of Mongu

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Rt. Rev. Patrick Chisanga, OFM Conv., Bishop of Mansa

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Rt. Rev. Valentine Kalumba, OMI, Bishop of Livingstone

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Rt. Rev. Edwin Mulandu, Bishop of Mpika

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Rt. Rev. Raphael Mweempwa, Bishop of Monze

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