

ZAMBIA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

That they may have abundant life (John 10:10)

A Pastoral Statement

To the Catholic faithful and all people of goodwill.

Grace, mercy and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18)

In the first instance, we take this opportunity to thank God for the relatively peaceful transition that this nation experienced during and after the tripartite elections of September 2011.

1.0 Church and State Relations

The common denominator and our mutual rallying point between the Church and the State is that we are both concerned about the common good and the well-being of God’s people. It is from this point of view that we welcome the easing of tensions between the Catholic Church and the Government. It is our prayer and hope that we never again return to that era in which our national media was used to demonise and vilify innocent citizens and organisations.

So far, our relations with the new Government are cordial. We would like to reiterate what we have always said to previous Governments. Our prophetic voice on national issues is motivated by our divine obligation and wish to see the Government of the

day perform better and succeed. What we say in the public sphere has nothing to do with any perceived dislike or preference of any particular Government of the day

With this in mind and given the many voices that speak to the leadership, our high expectation is that the new Government will continue to listen to the voice of the voiceless as articulated, especially by those within the ambit of the three Church mother bodies, namely the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) and the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ). Similarly, there are other well meaning civic organisations and faiths.

As ZEC, we acknowledge that for the first time in the history of this nation, we have a Catholic President. The fact that there is a Catholic in State House will not, in any way, influence how we interact with the Zambian Government. We will continue to be to be guided by the Gospel and the Social Teaching of the Church in all that we say and do.

2.0 The new Republican Constitution-making Process

When the Republican President invited the Bishops to sit on the Constitution Technical Committee, we welcomed the invitation and in turn delegated the responsibility to one of our priests who is ably representing us on the committee. Nevertheless, we will continue participating in the constitution-making debate.

Having said that, we wish to state that we would have been happier to see a legal instrument that safeguards and protects the constitution-making process and its content. From experience, we have learnt that if the constitution-making process is not sufficiently protected by law, it is prone to political manipulation. Much as the new Government has given the Zambian people assurances that the current process will be independent and that the Government will endeavour to deliver a people driven Constitution, these assurances are based on trust rather than on a legal framework.

We would like to call on the Government to show more commitment towards the constitution-making process by already appointing a Referendum Commission so that this Commission starts preparatory work in anticipation of the draft Constitution.

We urge the Constitution Technical Committee to bear in mind that Zambia has already spent enormous amounts of money on the Constitution-making process and the public is anxious to know how much more their Government is going to spend this time around.

3.0 Corruption

Take your wrong doing out of my sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed (Is 1:17)

Efforts being made by Government to fight corruption must be commended. Nevertheless, in today's contentious environment where everybody seems to have their own version of truth, we urge the Government to exercise due diligence and insist that the fight against corruption be carried out within the confines of the rule of law. The fight against corruption must be free of any symptoms that betray the misuse of the judicial process to target political opponents. Instead, this fight must promote good stewardship of public resources, social justice and the common good. Our understanding of justice is that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

More specifically, Government must demonstrate how it is reforming public accountability systems to avert future corrupt practices by those in public office, today.

While political leaders may seem to be corrupt, we are aware that the civil service is the engine of development in any nation. We appeal to civil servants to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the fight against corruption.

We also invite all Church members to embrace a conversion of heart and lead exemplary lives.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36: 26 -27).

4.0 Appointments to public offices

There is a general perception in the country that from the time the new Government was ushered into power, a number of appointments to public office have unfortunately been tainted with nepotism and regionalism.

It is our view that appointments to the civil service and diplomatic postings should be transparent, devoid of political patronage, nepotism and regionalism. Therefore, if this is not addressed, it has a demoralising effect on career diplomats and professionalism in civil service.

We urge the Republican President to be more inclusive when making ministerial and other appointments to public office. This nation has enjoyed relative peace over the years because of the ‘One Zambia, One Nation’ motto. All citizens must feel a sense of belonging to this nation.

5.0 Management of Public Resources

“Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards, responsible for all these varied graces of God, put it at the service of others” (1Pt 4:10).

We have observed that the Government has initiated efforts to use the resources of this country prudently. Nevertheless, we also notice apparent contradictions that have come along with this measure. While it may be a good strategy of saving public resources by reducing the number of Government Ministries, cutting down on foreign travel and many others, we also see policies that seem to overstretch public resources, such as, new additional Diplomatic Missions abroad in an era where richer nations are closing and rationalising their respective embassies.

There are many other extravagances such as the setting up of many Commissions of Inquiry instead of consolidating existing investigative wings. The creation of new districts is good in that it will bring the administrative infrastructure closer to the people. However, the creation of new districts should be done in a manner that follows a discernible and comprehensive decentralisation plan and programme of implementation. It is hoped that any resources saved from these programmed measures would be ploughed towards job creation and poverty eradication.

6.0 Education in Zambia

It is probably common knowledge that it is especially in the education and health sectors that the church works closely with Government.

We wish to welcome the phasing out of the basic education and high school system thus reverting to a more conventional primary, secondary and tertiary education arrangement and re-introducing early childhood education. However, the quality of education has been affected by frequent programmatic changes. We hope that this time around, the changes will be better planned, executed and sustainable. It is, also imperative that Government embarks on a deliberate and focused sensitisation of the public, parents and school children, for them to understand and appreciate the implications of the new changes. It would thus be most useful if the Government

would provide the public with information on the timeframe within which the return to primary, secondary and tertiary education would come into effect.

We are aware of the Government's plans to establish universities in various parts of the country. We feel that whereas this plan is commendable, the Government should not neglect to simultaneously rehabilitate existing schools, universities and technical colleges.

From experience, existing universities produce hundreds of graduates per year. Most of these are either unemployed or struggle to find jobs. With this in mind, we think that the answer lies in more technical colleges or polytechnics. These we think greatly contribute to the improvement in the performance of the country's industries because they provide the required artisans and crafts persons. In fact graduates from these technical colleges are almost ready-made self-employers.

We hope that the promised announcement to turn all community schools into Government institutions will be done as soon as possible in order to help many poor children who depend on these institutions for their education.

The Government, however, needs to do more to improve on teacher's remuneration, recruitment, retention, and motivation. We have noted with dismay, nowadays, that teachers spend more time on private tuitions and less on their classroom jobs. Clearly, there is need for more supervision of teachers if the standards of education are to be improved and the intended promotion of universal access to basic education is to be meaningful.

In this vein, while appreciating the recent doubling of doctor's salaries, we urge that this be holistically extended to other professions in the civil service such as nurses and teachers. This, we hope will bring an end to private tuitions by teachers and rampant moonlighting that exists in the civil service.

7.0 Health and the Hospices

While we appreciate the Government's commitment to open up more than 600 new health centres, we think that existing health facilities should be given priority through adequate funding, sufficient medicines, proper staffing levels and the provision of up to-date equipment.

We are also disturbed to learn that hospices, which in our view are another level of health care for those who are terminally ill and dying, are closing due to lack of funding. It is disheartening to learn that Government is reluctant to fund hospices because it does not recognise them as health institutions under the Ministry of Health structure. Hospices are even not included in the national health strategic plan as they are regarded as private community initiatives.

From a moral point of view, we find this unacceptable because without hospices, the terminally ill would be in already congested hospitals. Besides, it is the responsibility of Government to look after the terminally ill.

We therefore appeal to Government to recognise and support hospices as an integral part of health delivery to the citizens of Zambia. We remain hopeful that the Ministry of Health would urgently find alternative practical ways and means of sustaining hospices struggling for lack of requisite funding.

8.0 Rwandese Refugees

...For I was a stranger, and you welcomed me (Matthew 25:35)

As church leaders with a long tradition of advocacy for refugee rights, we recognise that Zambia has had more than 50 years of refugee protection in this country. Since Independence, Zambia has always been ‘an oasis of peace’ in the midst of a region of conflict. This has consequently made Zambia a haven for refugees.

We are therefore greatly disturbed by complaints among refugees, especially those from Rwanda that the Ministry of Home Affairs, in agreement with the local United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and possibly the Rwandese government, is trying to forcibly repatriate Rwandese refugees from Zambia. We believe that it is not right for the Office of the Zambian Government’s Commissioner for Refugees and the UNHCR, to remove the refugee status from Rwandese nationals based in Zambia or those from other countries and to oblige them to return to their own country against their wishes. In this respect, it is perhaps an opportune time for Zambia to review the Refugees Control Act, 1970, with a view to instituting protection against refoulement, even on selective country basis. This would be in keeping with Article 33(1) of 1954 United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Convention and the United Nations Principle on Non-Refoulement

We are inclined to agree with the United States Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International that this is not the time to facilitate the removal of the refugee status. Moreover, the refugee population in Zambia has greatly declined with the voluntary

repatriation of thousands of refugees. If anything, we would thus request the Zambian Government to regularise the status of some refugees in this country and facilitate that they be accorded local integration, including freedom of movement and of employment. This will enable them to live normal lives.

9.0 The Barotseland Question

In the wake of the tragic events of the Western Province which culminated in violence, injuries and loss of lives on Friday, 14 January 2011, ZEC issued a solidarity Pastoral Statement on 6 February 2011.

We acknowledge the Government's response so far to the Barotseland question, particularly with the setting up of the Rodger Chongwe Commission of Inquiry. Similarly, we welcome developments that reduce tension in Western Province through the release from prison, of Mongu-riots remandees as well as publishing of the *Barotseland Agreement 1964* in our national print media.

In our solidarity Pastoral Statement, we suggested that at the bottom of all the unrest in the Western Province is the perception that the province is marginalised in matters of development. The Barotseland question is simply a critique of how Zambia is socio-economically and politically governed.

We look forward to the timely release of the Rodger Chongwe Commission Report and we urge the Government and other stakeholders to create a calm environment which will facilitate for the resolution of this matter. We would like to believe that now there is sufficient goodwill and commitment from all stakeholders. This also entails the need for Government to work out an amicable solution towards a clearly spelt out strategy of addressing the Barotseland issue. Such an approach will probably be long and protracted, but we appeal for a spirit of soberness, inclusiveness and participation by all stakeholders. The complexities of the Barotseland question that often give rise to explosive emotions should be understood within a participatory framework.

As Zambians, we must thank God for the relative peace we have enjoyed since independence. Each one of us has a duty to contribute to the sustenance of that peace, healing and reconciliation by behaving in a responsible way, respectful of other people and their human rights.

10.0 Agriculture

We think that development efforts should be seen to be equitable. Our rural areas have always lagged behind in terms of national development, especially in infrastructure development. It is a well-known factor that any improvement in infrastructure in the rural areas helps in stemming the drift of people to urban areas.

We believe more can still be done in boosting agriculture, especially small scale farming. The Farmer Input Support Programme is a good initiative but must be transparent and better managed to reach peasant farmers and extended to the youth.

To this day, there are many peasant farmers who have not yet been paid for the produce of last year delivered to the Food Reserve Agency (FRA). This is not only unjust but unacceptable. Government should quickly and systematically redress this situation. Furthermore, we look forward to a situation where all the maize that is grown in this country will be properly stored and protected from the elements. The onus is on Government to ensure that there is more investment into maize storage facilities.

In addition, agricultural extension services need to be stepped up and access to finance and marketing of produce needs to be improved. There should be more investment in promoting irrigation infrastructure, water conservation through dams, weirs and other similar measures as well as water harvesting given the prevailing unstable weather pattern.

Good workable agricultural policies will, in ZEC's view, go a long way in creating employment for the youth in our country.

11.0 Road Works Development

It is ZEC's view that the development of the country's road works ought to be a continuous national programme. While new roads are being constructed, there must be a deliberate effort to regularly maintain existing roads and to progressively upgrade others. More investment in road construction and maintenance is therefore critical. This investment should also be safeguarded by proper monitoring of performance of various contractors doing works on behalf of Government.

12.0 Rebasing of the Zambian currency

We have noted that the Government has announced the intention to rebase the currency by removing three zeroes and introducing new currency notes and coins. We are aware that this is something that has happened in other countries of Africa. However, to most Zambians, this is something that is very new indeed. It is therefore an issue that requires clear explanation from the Government so that even the person in the village will understand the concept and the implications. The majority of our people are uneducated and may be taken advantage of by some unscrupulous people.

Of necessity, the Government will have to prepare and disseminate information in Zambian languages.

Further, the Government will need to mount a massive publicity campaign to sensitise all stakeholders in the country with regard to this impending change.

13.0 Climate Change and Deforestation

The effects of climate change are already manifesting in our country in the form of irregular rains, flooding and drought. Deforestation and desertification are also worrying challenges that call for urgent attention. It is a well known factor that the Government has at a number of national and international forums deliberated on the effects of climate change and drawn up strategies and policies for climate change adaptation. It is important for the Government, now more than ever, to engage more stakeholders about any measures being contemplated at policy implementation level. It is equally urgent for the Government to step up public campaigns to sensitise the public at grassroots level on the unfolding climate change and what mitigating measures it has proposed to put in place.

We, therefore, strongly appeal to the Government to take firm measures of controlling deforestation arising from such activities as charcoal burning, and wanton logging by both citizens and foreigners to avoid our forests being depleted at an alarming rate. Government should seriously consider investing in alternative sources of energy especially for the poor in our villages and peri-urban communities.

14.0 Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment is becoming alarming. ZEC is also aware that since last September's tripartite elections, expectations for new job opportunities among the youth are very high. These expectations need to be met or somehow satisfied. So many of our unemployed youth are vulnerable and it is not surprising that they end up as tools of violence at the hands of unscrupulous politicians. It is, therefore, imperative that the Government should formulate a deliberate policy that addresses youth unemployment and implements practical measures for such a policy.

15.0 Wealth Creation

As ZEC, we recommit ourselves to continue being the voice of the poor. As shepherds, we will not be silent in the face of injustice. The wealth and natural resources of this country are a common good that should be shared by all.

We recognise that the frequent work stoppages and industrial unrest in the country are symptoms of extreme discontent and injustices in labour relations. The trend, which started in the early 1990s with the liberalisation of trade unions which resulted in unintended consequences of undermining trade unions, must stop.

Better exploitation of our God-given natural resources should be used for wealth creation and the eradication of poverty in our midst. We must realise, for example, that mining and logging permanently deplete the country's natural resources and have far reaching consequences on the environment. It is imperative therefore, that relevant mining and logging companies contribute to a natural resources fund that could be used to reconstitute the depleted environment in a more tangible and enduring manner for the benefit of affected communities.

As things stand, we feel that not much is being gained by the country from the mining industry. In this regard, we are yet to see tangible results from the measures that Government announced during the 2012 National Budget. In the meantime, we call for stronger regulatory mechanisms that will ensure that foreign investment, especially mining, contributes to human development in Zambia. Realistic taxes must be agreed upon and so should better labour and environmental standards. Corporate social responsibility must be strengthened and encouraged especially from our investors. It is important, however, that this corporate social responsibility is not cosmetic or a mere public relations act, but genuine. All these could be embedded in a better regulatory framework and to this effect; we would like to suggest the creation of ethical committees which seem to work well in countries with similar challenges.

16.0 Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Results from surveys such as the ones conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) seem to indicate that cases of violence against women in Zambia are on the increase. It might well be that more Zambian women are now breaking the silence and reporting such violence. If this is the case, then there is hope for our society.

We nonetheless wish to condemn all acts of violence against women and several other abuses which women endure. We support calls on the Government to implement the anti-Gender Based Violence Act.

On our part, we pledge to continue supporting efforts that seek to empower women take their rightful place in society and in the Church. In line with Proposition No. 47 of the Second African Synod on Women in Africa, we acknowledge that women in our

country and in Africa make a great contribution to the family, society and the Church with their many talents and resources.

17.0 Child defilement in our Society

The apparent increase and prevalence of cases to do with child defilement, across our nation, is a phenomenon that is worrying. It is not uncommon to hear or read, in the media, about children as young as six months becoming victims of these indecent and inhuman acts by adults. It is extremely sad that in several cases, the perpetrators of child defilement are parents, guardians, relatives, married men or professional people who should normally have the interests of children close to their hearts.

We therefore appeal to everyone in our society to work towards child protection and the complete eradication of this horrific problem which is fast becoming blight on our society.

18.0 HIV and AIDS

The HIV and AIDS pandemic continues to devastate families in Zambia and is still one of the greatest threats to our survival both as a nation and as a continent. As a Church, we must continue to help prevent the spread of new infections and reach out to those who are infected.

Parents, teachers, priests and the religious should never tire in equipping children and the youth with sound values and virtues that will assist them shun pre-marital sex in order that they will lead chaste lives.

19.0 Conclusion

We would like to urge the people of Zambia to remain prayerful and hardworking to ensure that mother Zambia prospers and that the wealth of the country is equitably shared to all.

As we thank God for the economic and social development that is taking place in Zambia, we also ask God to continue blessing our effort to change the lives of the people of this country for the better.

Issued at Kapingila House, Lusaka, Zambia on 29 January, 2012 and Signed by

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- ***Most. Rev. Ignatius Chama*** – Archbishop of Kasama, Apostolic Administrator of Mpika and ZEC President
- ***Rt. Rev. Alick Banda*** – Bishop of Ndola and ZEC Vice President
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