



Zambia Episcopal Conference
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PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2025 YOUTH DAY COMMEMORATION UNDER THE THEME: "VOICES AMPLIFIED AND INNOVATIONS IGNITED".

Today, on Youth Day 2025, we unequivocally demand greater recognition, inclusion, and empowerment for young people across Zambia. The future of our nation depends on harnessing the boundless creativity, passion, and innovative ideas of our youth. Their voices must no longer remain on the sidelines but must lead conversations and influence decisions that shape their lives and communities.

This day serves as a powerful reminder of the important role youth play in shaping our communities, driving change, and building a better future. Zambia is among the countries in the world with the highest population of young people. Currently, the population of young people aged between **15 to 35 years** in Zambia stands at **56%** - approximately **10,982,032** from the total population of **19,610,769**.¹ As such, the Youth Day commemoration serves as a powerful reminder of the important role youth play in shaping our communities, driving change, and building a better future.

Therefore, in line with this year's theme; "**Voices Amplified and Innovations Ignited**," It is imperative for government to put this year's theme into strengthening the involvement of young people while leveraging on their creative and innovative ideas in addressing many national and global challenges they face.

Therefore, Caritas Zambia recognises the numerous challenges which have in a long-time affected involvement of youth in various platforms including decision making and some of these include the following:

1. **Gender Vulnerability especially among young people** - particularly girls and young women – which manifest in forms of Gender-Based Violence (GMB), early marriages, and

¹ ZamStats Staff (December 23, 2022). "[Trend in population size, Zambia 1969 - 2022](#)". *ZamStats*. Retrieved February 5, 2023

limited access to education and economic opportunities (UNICEF, 2023). The patriarchal norms which often restrict young women’s ability to engage in decision-making processes, limiting their participation in leadership and innovation. On the other hand, young men also face challenges such as societal pressure to conform to traditional gender expectations, which often push them into risky behaviours, including substance abuse and criminal activities.

2. **Alcohol and drug abuse among young people** – It is evident that globally, about 2.6 million deaths per year are attributable to alcohol consumption – which is accounting for 4.7% of all deaths, and 0.6 million deaths to psychoactive drug use. Key to note is that, 2 million of alcohol and 0.4 million of drug-attributable deaths were among men (WHO, 2024). While in Zambia, young people aged between 12 to 35 seeking counselling resulting from alcohol and illicit drug dependence has increased from 810 in 2021 to 1,212 in 2022.²
3. **Exposure to Diseases** – It is evident that youth in Zambia are at high risk of contracting diseases due to illicit drug abuse which compromise their judgement on certain choices they make, inadequate healthcare access, poor sanitation, and limited awareness. Malaria, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, remain significant health threats (WHO, 2023). Additionally, the rise of mental health due to unemployment and economic hardships is negatively affecting young people’s overall well-being.
4. **Climate change has led to extreme weather conditions such as floods and droughts** - which has directly impacted young people. Floods have displaced families, disrupted education, and increased the incidence of waterborne diseases. Droughts, on the other hand, have contributed to food insecurity and malnutrition (Zambia Meteorological Department, 2023). These extreme weather conditions are pushing many young people into poverty, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and other risky survival strategies.
5. **The Rise of illicit sexual activities among both young men and women** – This has contributed to the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Zambia. Peer pressure, economic hardship, and a lack of proper sexual education have led to an increase in unprotected sex and transactional relationships (National HIV/AIDS Council, 2023). Many young people,

² <https://diggers.news/local/2024/02/09/drug-and-alcohol-abuse-by-minors-worries-minister/>



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particularly girls, engage in sex to survive due to poverty, while substance abuse among young men is fuelling risky sexual behaviour. As a result, HIV infection rates have risen sharply, with statistics indicating a rise from 43% to 87% in Lusaka for individuals aged 20-35 in 2025.

In response to these pressing challenges, Caritas Zambia proposes the following strategic interventions for the government:

1. **Strengthen Youth Participation in Decision-Making** – Caritas Zambia implore government to strengthen the engagement of young people in policy making at both the national and local levels. The government should also increase funding and support for youth-led initiatives in governance, entrepreneurship, and community development. Furthermore, the government should also strengthen civic education programs to empower young people to advocate for their rights and actively participate in democratic processes.
2. **Address Gender Vulnerability** – This is essential to enforce and strengthen laws against gender-based violence, child marriage, and discrimination. Caritas Zambia urge government to strengthen mentorship and empowerment programs which should be developed for young women and girls to increase their participation in leadership and economic activities. Therefore, gender equality should take a holistic approach and should be promoted in education, employment, and decision-making structures.
3. **Improve Healthcare and Disease Prevention** – Caritas Zambia urges government to strengthen the establishment of youth-friendly healthcare services, particularly for sexual and reproductive health services. The government should also increase awareness campaigns on HIV/AIDS prevention and promote access to testing, and treatment. **On Mental Health** - There is also an urgent need to invest in mental health services tailored to young people, particularly to address depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.
4. **Strengthen Climate Resilience and Disaster Preparedness** – Caritas Zambia challenges government to strengthen the development of youth driven climate resilient programs to address the impact of floods and droughts. Further, promoting drought resilient agricultural activities and providing entrepreneurial opportunities for young farmers would also help alleviate the effects of climate change.
5. **Combat Illicit Sex and HIV/AIDS** – through the implementation of comprehensive sexual education programs is essential. Furthermore, Caritas Zambia also challenge the



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government to provide economic opportunities for young people to reduce their reliance on transactional sex due to financial hardship. As such, the Government should strengthen collaboration with the Church, NGOs and CSOs to raise awareness and support for youth affected by HIV/AIDS is also critical.

A message to the youth:

- ✓ Never underestimate your power to ignite change and innovative ideas or solutions. Be fearless in demanding space at every table, ensuring your voices are heard loud and clear. Embrace opportunities to lead, create, and inspire, knowing that your perspective is essential to building a just, equitable, and prosperous society.
- ✓ Challenge barriers boldly, advocate passionately, and support one another in your journeys toward empowerment and equality. Together, you have the strength to break through obstacles such as gender inequality, limited healthcare access, climate change, and poverty.
- ✓ Remember, empowerment begins with you—educate yourself, engage actively, and support each other. Amplify your voice, ignite your innovative spirit, and lead us towards a brighter, more inclusive future

Finally, Caritas Zambia urges government to address these challenges holistically to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of young people which will ultimately contribute to national develop while creating a safe and enabling environment for them to thrive and reach their full potential. Caritas Zambia is also optimistic that if these challenges are addressed, it would strengthen the participation of young and amplify their voices in decision-making and support their innovative ideas to ignite and drive sustainable national development.

ISSUED BY:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "G. Mapulanga".

Fr. Dr. Gabriel Mapulanga
Executive Director