



## **The Pastoral Statement on the State of the Nation**

***“Hear O my people and I will admonish you...” Psalm 81:8***

To our dear brothers and sisters in Christ and people of goodwill.

Peace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

### **Preamble**

We, the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), having listened to the cries of our people for guidance on political, economic, moral and social issues affecting the nation, do hereby share with you the following:

#### **1. Political environment**

A serene and conducive political environment is the hallmark of human society. We acknowledge the good intentions by Government to bring sanity to the political landscape in the Nation by reducing cadreism in public places and political violence. However, we note the following.

##### **1.1. Shrinking of democratic space**

Human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are arbitrarily being trampled on especially against those considered to hold dissenting political views or persons belonging to opposition political parties. Intimidation of media houses by state institutions, based on the guests they invite, and the content discussed on their platforms, curtails both media freedom and free speech. This practice also sends an indirect message to media houses to stay away from discussing uncomfortable but very important topics of public interest and to shun or marginalise certain voices whose views may be deemed as unfavourable to those in authority.

The right to peaceful assembly is a fundamental liberty that sustains the activities of political parties and civil society groups in constitutional democracies. On several occasions, however, the police have denied opposition parties the opportunity to exercise this crucial right on the grounds of lack of adequate manpower and unspecified security concerns. There is also a growing selective application of the rule of law. For instance, it has become a tradition for the police to arrest members of the opposition in a violent manner, keep them in detention longer than necessary, and never take their cases to court, long after being finally released on bond. All these serve as examples of undemocratic practices that fall far short of the respect for civil and political rights that the Constitution obliges the State to uphold.

### **1.2. Political Parties**

Political parties have a huge responsibility in the promotion of peace and democracy. However, we have noted that the political situation is being characterised by the continued politicking and trivialising of important national matters. There is need for a genuine and right way of doing politics. Politicians ought to realise and appreciate that their priority should be service to the Zambian people and the ruling party should lead and be seen to lead the way in practising good politics.

It seems that political parties are more concerned with eliminating or weakening each other. However, political parties should be concerned with strengthening themselves by not fighting to outdo each other but presenting policies that are more competitive in the improvement of the welfare of the people. We are also of the view that intra party politics should be handled in a mature and well measured manner amongst the political players within their party.

### **1.3. Judiciary**

It is the mandate of the judiciary to adjudicate in matters where a stalemate has been reached in a political party. This must be done in an impartial, objective, and timely manner. We call upon the Chief Justice of Zambia to provide effective leadership to the bench so that matters that require urgent resolution are heard and determined in an efficient manner. Any undue delays by the Judiciary in adjudicating political disputes has the potential to heighten tension in the country and stoke further divisions.

### **1.4. Parliament**

Parliament is a place of honour and dignity endowed with the privilege to legislate on behalf of the Zambian people. However, some of the recent happenings in the House fall below the expectation of the citizenry. We, therefore, urge the House and

especially the presiding officers and lawmakers to conduct themselves above board and instil confidence in the people with regard to this important arm of government.

We further urge the Speaker to embrace criticism, build multi-partisan consensus, and accept that she or he is the Speaker of the National Assembly, not of a given political party or another arm of Government. It is also important for presiding officers in the National Assembly to follow the Constitution of Zambia, not precedence or tradition, when dealing with issues that touch on the supreme law of the land and whose resolution has a significant bearing on the character of our Republic as a multiparty democracy. The election of different leaders in the National Assembly, for instance, should be guided by the Constitution, not precedence, especially in instances where that precedence may be unconstitutional. Precedence is to be observed only in relation to following the constitution of the Republic, not its violation.

#### **1.5. Response to criticism by those in public office**

We are abhorred by the way politicians in general and those in government in particular respond to public criticism. Some resort to the use of uncouth and abusive language. Others employ intimidation, name calling, and rogue websites to maliciously scandalise critics and political opponents. We don't expect this uncalled for behaviour from leaders in a democratic society where divergent views must be accommodated. It is a mark of leadership to embrace criticism, especially of a crucial and constructive kind. The public has the right to provide feedback on government performance and activities. The responsibility of public officials is to harness this feedback, regardless of the medium through which it is conveyed. We urge politicians to use respectful language in public discourse and be tolerant to divergent views.

## **2. Economic situation**

We have noted with appreciation the good will by the government to restructure the economy to create an enabling environment for the development of our country. We are aware of the government's efforts to restructure the national debt. These efforts are commendable. However, we urge government to be transparent in the whole process and subsequent debt contraction. We demand full disclosure of all bilateral and multilateral agreements as well as transparency in publication of the mining agreements with investors so that the Zambian people know what their public leaders are signing on their behalf.

### **2.1. High cost of living**

Both the exchange rate and inflation have risen considerably in recent months and these trends are adversely affecting the economy. Consequently, the cost of living and doing business has escalated. While we commend the Government for the Zambia National Service mealie meal initiative that has seen the price of the commodity slightly reduced in some areas, however, we consider the price is still too high for the ordinary Zambian. We ask the Government to identify the root causes of the high mealie meal prices and put in place effective measures that would reduce the prices to ones that even the poor can afford. Like water, food is life. We call on the Government to provide affordable and accessible food to the citizenry as a matter of urgent priority since the cost of living has become unbearable for most households.

### **2.2. Review the mining tax regime**

To generate increased public revenue for alleviating poverty and investing in social programmes, we urge the government to review mining concessions and tax holidays given to multinational corporations. Mining is the mainstay of Zambia's economy, and it is unacceptable that the industry continues to contribute far less to the national treasury than it should. Due to increasing use of technology, mining employs significantly lower numbers of people today than it did in earlier decades. As a result, the most assured way of deriving maximum benefits from this vital industry is through effective tax and shareholding policies such as those implemented in Botswana, Chile, and other countries rich in mineral resources. We urge the Government to increase its stake in mining companies in relation to shareholding and actively promote local ownership.

### **2.3. Agriculture**

In the spirit of economic diversification, agriculture can play a big role in job creation both at small and large-scale farming and can guarantee food security. Food security produces a wide range of positive impacts including economic growth and poverty reduction (cf. ZCCB, *Statement on the State of the Nation, 2022*).

Farming Input Support Programme (FISP) can help many of our small-scale farmers. However, this programme has not been free from abuse. In pursuit of improving the same, there seems to be little engagement nor prior preparation with beneficiaries being removed from the programme. It is the duty of Government to be more engaging whenever a new course of action is being undertaken. We urge the Government to increase funding to the FISP and improve its handling of the distribution of farming inputs to avoid food shortages in the future.

## **2.4. Manufacturing industry**

Successive governments have promised to develop Zambia's manufacturing base but have done very little to realise this pledge when in office. We urge the Government to identify priority areas and take concrete steps that would actively support the development of manufacturing. The establishment of manufacturing industries can create employment in value chain addition. Products and services from these industries can bring the much-needed foreign exchange, and consequently strengthen our local currency to other convertible currencies. The Government promised to assist private business, especially small businesses, and entrepreneurs, but the continuing high bank lending rates is killing growth and entrepreneurship. We urge the officials to rectify this challenge.

## **3. Moral and social issues**

Any given society has a set of rules and regulations that enables its people to live together in harmony and serve each other with respect.

### **3.1. Service delivery**

There seems to be a disconnect between policies intended to remove rigidity and bottlenecks in service delivery and their implementations. The work culture being exhibited by some public officials in their service delivery leaves much to be desired. There are some public officers who when engaged have no courtesy to either acknowledge or respond. They respond only with recourse made to the highest office. However, this trend defeats the purpose of holding such positions. We demand that this comes to an end.

### **3.2. Constituency Development Fund (CDF)**

We acknowledge the good intention in increasing the threshold of CDF and the economic impact these funds may have at the local level. However, there are challenges that need to be investigated and acted upon to build an environment good enough to support the aspiration of the decentralisation policy. This includes the partial disbursement of the amounts. It is pointless to increase the annual CDF amount if only a fraction of it is released annually. We, therefore, call upon the government to release the allocations in their entirety and strengthen monitoring mechanisms on how the CDF is being implemented, and the quality of projects that are being undertaken.

### **3.3. Use of social media**

We are cognizant of the fact that social media is here to stay and the benefits it has come with are numerous. However, we bemoan the abuse of this tool of communication. We are particularly concerned with the use of vulgar language which goes undeterred. We appeal to the conscience of everyone on the responsible use of social media and urge the statutory bodies responsible to be vigilant and enforce laws related to the same. We call upon the same statutory bodies to apply cyber laws stringently against websites set up for malicious purposes and whose handlers cannot easily be traced for the aggrieved to seek recourse to justice in the courts of law.

### **3.4. Protection of the family**

We have noticed with concern that LGBTQ+ agenda is gaining ground with clandestine support from some organisations that are swiftly championing this cause. This does not sit well with our culture and Christian values. We wish to state unequivocally that "...homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law... Under no circumstances can they be approved" (cf. Position of the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops on Homosexuality in Zambia, 2022). We, therefore, urge the Government to come out clearly in defence of the Christian Identity as enshrined in the Constitution and defend the marriage between man and woman, in accordance with the natural order.

### **3.5. "Lucifer of Zambia"**

The denunciation of Archbishop Alick Banda as the "Lucifer of Zambia" by the UPND Secretary General Mr Batuke Imenda was not only an affront on the person of the Archbishop Banda but the entire Catholic Church and its leadership in Zambia. Until now, the Chief Executive Officer of the Ruling Party has not retracted his words nor apologised apart from the party and its government calling for a ceasefire. The demeaning of the Archbishop by UPND is simply a demonstration of the spirit of intolerance towards criticism as alluded to above.

### **3.6. The need for constant communication**

It is important for those in public office to tell the people what is being done in their name. The culture of only emerging to defend rather than explain government actions should stop. What is needed is not the ability to mislead the people; it is the need to communicate what the government is doing. To this end, we call upon the Government to promote constant interaction between the governed and the

governors. The President of the Republic had previously pledged to hold quarterly press conferences. We urge State House to honour this pledge.

### **3.7. Improving transparency and democratic reform**

The current Party in power promised to improve democratic freedom in two important areas: (i) reform of the Public Order Act so as to establish the people's right to hold public meetings and make public processions and protests; (ii) enact an Access to Information Act to establish the public's access to government information. We call on the Government to expedite the review of the Public Gathering Bill so that the right to public assembly can be enjoyed without undue restraint. In the meantime, we urge the police to allow opposition parties to hold public rallies without interference. The right to peaceful assembly is a constitutional liberty that should be enjoyed all the time, not just during elections.

We welcome the decision by the Government to table before Parliament the long-awaited Access to Information Bill. We recall that an Access to Information Bill was originally promised by the MMD in 1991 and a Draft Bill was even brought before parliament only for it to be withdrawn after protracted debate 'for consultation with other countries which had similar legislation'. The PF government of 2011 also promised an ATI Act, and even produced a Draft Bill in 2012, but no Bill was ever put before parliament. We invite all Zambians to carefully read the latest Draft to ensure that it complies with international standards. We also remain hopeful that the UPND government will enact this long-awaited law that would increase government transparency.

### **4. Conclusion**

We invite all Zambians to preserve the multi-party and democratic character of our State, to work hard for a better Zambia, and to safeguard our national identity of One Zambia One Nation by avoiding any form of tribal, political, or religious discrimination. And we urge all Zambians to work for peace for our nation.

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*END OF THE STATEMENT*

Given on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023, at Kapingila Guest House, Lusaka.

Signed:

**Most Rev. Ignatius Chama,**

*Archbishop of Kasama and ZCCB President*

**Rt. Rev. Charles Kasonde,**

*Bishop of Solwezi and ZCCB Vice President*

**Most Rev. Dr. Alick Banda,**

*Archbishop of Lusaka*

**Rt. Rev. George Cosmas Zumaile Lungu,**

*Bishop of Chipata*

**Rt. Rev. Dr. Benjamin Phiri,**

*Bishop of Ndola*

**Rt. Rev. Clement Mulenga, SDB,**

*Bishop of Kabwe*

**Rt. Rev. Evans Chinyama Chinyemba, OMI,**

*Bishop of Mongu*

**Rt. Rev. Patrick Chisanga, OFM Conv.,**

*Bishop of Mansa*

**Rt. Rev. Valentine Kalumba, OMI,**

*Bishop of Livingstone*

**Rt. Rev. Edwin Mulandu,**

*Bishop of Mpika*

**Rt. Rev. Raphael Mweempwa,**

*Bishop of Monze*

**Rt. Rev. Gabriel Msipu Phiri,**

*Auxiliary Bishop of Chipata*

+ Ignatius Chama  
+ Charles Kasonde  
+ Alick Banda  
+ George Lungu  
+ Benjamin Phiri  
+ Clement Mulenga  
+ Evans Chinyama  
+ Patrick Chisanga  
+ Valentine Kalumba  
+ Edwin Mulandu  
+ Raphael Mweempwa  
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