

## **ZAMBIA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS.**

### **IF YOU WANT PEACE, WORK FOR JUSTICE (Paul VI)**

**“Let Justice flow, down like a river that never dries ...” (Amos 5:24)**

### **STATEMENT ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN ZAMBIA**

To all Catholic faithful and all people of good will in Zambia. This is Easter Tide when we celebrate the great feast of Easter till the feast of Pentecost. My greeting to you is in the words of St. Paul: “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:2-3; and Ephesians 1:2).

#### **PREAMBLE**

1. As Shepherds of the Church, it is our honour, privilege and duty to teach and guide the faithful through instructing them in matters of faith and morals. It is also our duty to enlighten them concerning the issues confronting them in their daily lives in the light of our faith and the teaching of the Church as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) so succinctly put and expressed it: “The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”

2. The Prophet Jeremiah reminds us in Chapter 22 verse 16 that we cannot claim to know God if we fail to respond to and confront the injustices in our society because “to know God means to do justice” and “to do justice is to know God.” Therefore, knowing God cannot be separated from doing justice and from what we do or omit to do to our neighbour. Consequently, people who inflict pain and suffering to their fellow human beings cannot claim to know God, let alone be “Christian!”

3. The unfortunate incident that happened in Mongu during the Kuomboka ceremony has since been followed by the arrest and detention of Mr. Hakainde Hichilema followed by the slapping of a treason charge on him. We do not in any way condone illegality. We nevertheless deplore the massive, disproportionate and entirely unnecessary force with which the Police acted in apprehending him. Would it not have been much more civilised and professional to deliver a summons to him containing a charge and ordering him to appear before the police to answer charges of alleged law breaking? The brutal way in which the Police acted has only served to heighten the already considerable tension in the nation particularly between supporters of the UPND and PF. The peace that we wish for you and the nation at large in the words of St. Paul is not mere absence of war or strife. Peace means harmony, understanding, respect for and acceptance of others, respect for and even defence of divergence of opinion, wishing others well no matter who they are and what they do for a living. This peace comes

from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. This peace right now is in short supply in our nation. Why?

4. The continuous tension between the UPND and PF has affected the lives of many other citizens in the country who are living in fear and are not going about their business of life freely. We as Shepherds of the Catholic Church in our country are deeply saddened by the incidents of unprofessional and brutal conduct of the Police Service, the damage to the innocent citizens' property by suspected cadres, the arbitrary arrests of and horrific torture of suspects as well as the careless, inflammatory and divisive statements of our political leaders. All these are indications that our democratic culture is yet to be firmly planted, nurtured and promoted to enhance the respect for human dignity and rights. Our democratic credentials which have not been much to go by at best of times have all but vanished in this nation that loudly claims to be "God-fearing," "peace-loving" and "Christian."

5. It is our considered view that as a nation, we have lamentably failed to robustly address a number of recurrent snags including those that stem from our previous elections. The current political predicament directly flows from deep-rooted problems we have failed to fix or resolve, notwithstanding four constitutional commissions of inquiry. As we have stated before, "The political environment in Zambia, today, is characterized by manipulation, patronage and intimidation of perceived government opponents. We urge the government to stop using state security institutions to intimidate its own nationals. The police service in particular must be professional and impartial in carrying out their duties of maintaining law and order. Too many of the nation's resources and time are wasted on politicking at the expense of real development. This culture must change for the better."

6. Ideally, the period immediately after such a divisive election as was held in August 2016, our political leaders should have embarked upon a programme of national reconciliation, building and fostering dialogue by keeping old channels in good repair and creating new ones more suited to the new situation. Unfortunately, the Judiciary, the arm of government responsible for adjudicating between individuals and between institutions and delivering justice did do much, if anything, to engender a mutually acceptable solution.

7. We are also convinced that the big part of the problem is that politics in Zambia are still reeling in the hangover from the pre-independence political struggle for independence which was reinforced in the One-Party-State. This hangover derives from the wrong perception that political competition is aimed at annihilating or totally silencing political opponents at all costs and by all means available! This is the root cause of intra and interparty intolerance and violence. However, a democratic dispensation that cherishes the parliamentary democracy we would like to build and consolidate demands respect for divergent views and for the rights of individuals and political parties to organize, associate and assemble without any undue restrictions and intimidation. We are again disappointed when we review the events that marked the run up to the August 2016 elections. The democratic principles we have come to know have been violated left, right and Centre so that instead of going forward and consolidating our still

fragile democracy, we are retrogressing and not so slowly! The political party in power is in the driving seat of the political game on the political field.

We therefore demand from the government of the day to put in place concrete measures to reverse this worrying and dangerous trend.

## **OUR HOPES AND CONCERNS FOR 2017 POLITICAL SITUATION**

8. We applaud and praise those Zambians on the political playing field who, in spite of all sorts of provocation, are committed to peaceful means of doing politics and refrain from any violence, verbal or physical. These are the people who give us and the nation hope of holding on to a functional democracy in a multiparty scenario where there is more than ample room for citizens' participation through organized groups although there is tremendous pressure to the contrary. Such people are martyrs of true democracy and must be emulated.

9. We decry the bad habit which political parties in power assume immediately they make a government of using the Police Service to settle political scores and prevent their political rivals from organizing, campaigning and therefore selling their vision of the country and nation to the electorate. It is the same story from one administration to the other and the present government is no exception, if not one of the best examples of the misdeed just mentioned! As a result of brutalizing the people through the Police Service, the general public is reduced to fear so that the order of the day is corruption and misuse of public funds. Anyone who criticizes the government for wrong doing is sure to have the police unleashed on him or her.

10. We have always been concerned about the selective application of the Public Order Act by the Police. It is quite disgraceful that a quarter of a century after the return to plural politics and more than half a century of political independence from Great Britain, our governments which we put into power through our votes use the Public Order Act to oppress political opponents and prevent them from organizing and assembling together political rallies and to openly express themselves instead of protecting the rights and liberties of the very people who put them into power. Paradoxically, each political party in opposition goes through the biased use of this notorious Act but once in power, they find it so useful that they do nothing to modify or repeal it. Disgraceful indeed! We hope and pray that this law will be revised and if not, then the Police Service must be required to apply it professionally and without targeting opposition political parties only.

## **THE JUDICIARY**

11. It is an open secret that the Judiciary have let the country down by failing to stand up to political manipulation and corruption. How can one explain the failure of the Constitutional Court to hear and exhaustively conclude a presidential petition? We reiterate what we said before: "For some time now, there has been a persistent discourse on the state of the judiciary in Zambia with respect to its independence and impartiality. This situation has undermined public confidence in this institution. There is need to restore confidence in this important arm of Government. There are also many unresolved questions of public interest that have been left hanging and unanswered by the Executive." Where is the Judiciary to call the Executive to attention?

12. We also strongly denounce attacks on the Law Association of Zambia (LAZ) and the government's plans to undermine it. We believe that given optimum conditions, LAZ could play its rightful role as one of the most effective checks and balances in a true democratic dispensation. The plans to kill LAZ are discreditable and we hope and pray they will fail. Together with the Judiciary, LAZ is the last defence of citizens particularly in respect of excesses by the Executive.

#### **A POLICE SERVICE OR POLICE FORCE?**

13. What a pity that all the efforts and financial resources our government and the donor community spent to reform the Police from a British South Africa Company and British Colonial Administration Police Force to a modern one of being a Police Service have paid little, if any dividends at all. It is sad to see the police being used and acting like political party cadres. Police officers are supposed to and must be exemplary in following the rule of law since they are in-charge of keeping law and order. We strongly appeal to the Police Service Personnel to be professional in their conduct, impartial and scrupulously fair in the manner that ensures and is seen to ensure that citizens' rights are respected, protected and not violated. We call upon the government to depoliticise the Police Service forthwith and leave them to do a professional job they have been trained for. Almost immediately after independence, the politicians took over the Police Service as they told them whom to arrest and prosecute and who not to touch!

#### **CULTURE OF SILENCE**

14. There is fear and trembling among the people shown in the way they are afraid to speak out against injustices. This is due to several actions by government which were meant to instil fear into and intimidate the masses. One does not need to belong to a political party in order for him or her to speak out on the misdeeds happening in the nation. Furthermore, we are witnesses to what transpired during the run-up to the August 2016 general elections when several media houses were harassed and finally closed. The recent happenings were not reported by several media houses because of the heavy presence of the Police. Our country is now all, except in designation, a dictatorship and if it is not yet, then we are not far from it. Our political leaders in the ruling party often issue intimidating statements that frighten people and make us fear for the immediate and future. This must be stopped and reversed henceforth.

## **CALL FOR GENUINE DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION**

15. As hinted earlier on, the process of national healing and reconciliation after last year's election should have been priority number one for the government as the institution in the driving seat. Unfortunately, the Executive missed this chance. It has been opined that the Church Mother Bodies should have continued their arbitration role as evinced by the Holy Cross Cathedral Meeting before Easter last Year. That initiative was taken on the appeal to ZEC (ZCCB) of the President on 12th March 2016 on the occasion of the ordination of Bishop Justin Mulenga of Mpika Diocese. The Church Mother Bodies did their best but immediately after the meeting, the resolutions which had been taken and agreed to by the participating political party leaders were broken particularly by the ruling party. The Church Mother Bodies were not allowed to succeed! We believe strongly that now that the political party in power because it is now in a strong position and has nothing to fear by way of electoral defeat must be in the driving seat. The Church Mother Bodies, if called upon, are ready to come along.

16. The politicians especially those in the ruling party must realise that the nation they are governing is deeply divided between those who voted for UPND and those who voted for PF in the last elections. Let the politicians of both parties take it from us since we always have our ears close to the ground that our country now stands on the edge. It is no use playing an ostrich game by burying our heads in the sand thinking that the storm will pass away. It will not, at least not before it has done great harm to this nation. The use of force and intimidation are not the solution whatsoever. Only genuine and sincere dialogue aimed at national reconciliation is the long-term solution. This reconciliation must be firmly rooted in the Christian values of Truth, Forgiveness, Peace, Unity, Social Justice and Freedom. Let us learn to bury our immediate past and rise again to new life.

17. To the Church and other Religious Leaders, we appeal to them to be instruments of peace, reconciliation and unity. They must urge the entire membership of their flocks to be collectively and individually channels of peace and reconciliation thereby living to our Lord's call to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Shepherds and the faithful together must be committed to preaching messages of peace, reconciliation and love in word and in deed. Our nation is much larger and transcends our present and future individual or collective political fortunes.

**Issued and signed on 23rd April 2017 (Divine Mercy Sunday)**

**TG Mpundu Archbishop of Lusaka**

**PRESIDENT- ZAMBIA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (ZCCB).**

**24/4/17,**