

COST OF JCTR FOOD BASKET RECORDS SLIGHT INCREASE

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) Food Basket for a family of six in Lusaka for the month of July stands at K332,520. This is up by K3,950 from the June figure of K328,570. However, it must be pointed out that this cost is mainly for food. It excludes other essential items such as housing, electricity, water, transport, clothing, etc.

Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Economic and Social Development Project of the JCTR, observes that "The overall cost of the Food Basket can be influenced even by the rise in select or individual items composing it." The current rise in cost of Food Basket can be largely attributed to the price of mealie meal which has increased recently. This implies that the cost of living still continues to rise.

It is in the light of the rising cost of living that JCTR acknowledges the settlement of the wage dispute in the country and the importance of the recently released money to pay council workers' arrears by government. However, while acknowledging these two developments, JCTR would like to note the following very urgent points:

- *That the cost of living is still high. It is unlikely that the recent wage increase will in fact offset the rise in cost of living.*
- *That the settlement is not an end in itself. JCTR urges a continuous review of the wages to arrive at wages that more adequately reflect cost of living.*
- *That wages should be paid on time to mitigate suffering.*
- *That the recently released money by government to pay arrears due to council workers will go towards meeting that purpose and not be diverted for other purposes. Council workers in different parts of the country have had to endure a lot of suffering. It is only morally right that their suffering is lessened.*

"The importance of wages can not be overemphasised since human well being is among other things predicated on income. Household food security, sending children to school, medical expenses, etc., all depend among other things on people's ability to meet the costs involved," says Muweme.

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