

SITUATION OF PENSIONERS, FUEL PRICE INCREASE WORRY JCTR

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) wishes to express serious concern about the situation of pensioners and increases in the price of petrol and kerosene in the country.

Firstly, reports that about 90,000 pensioners are to lose what is rightly theirs for whatever reasons is highly objectionable. According to Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR, "this situation epitomizes one of the highest levels of injustice that violates the right to a pension and to insurance for old age.

Sadly in Zambia for a long time now, the situation of pensioners is one that raises serious moral and ethical questions. It is often the case that pensioners go through a lot of very difficult situations such as having nowhere to sleep when following their payments, unnecessary bureaucracy, etc., before they are given what rightly belongs to them.

The most unfortunate thing about all this is that it is taking place in a context, *first*, of many hardships with high cost of living prominent among them, and *second*, where a large amount of money is to be given to MPs for gratuity. This indeed appears to be unfair taking into account that pensioners have been waiting for months (years) and now are going to be further discriminated against.

Moreover, the long period of waiting before obtaining their money means that inflation erodes the value of the money. "Government must realize that", says Muweme, "to withhold someone's entitlement of pension is a grave injustice that denies those involved an opportunity to a dignified livelihood."

"In Zambia today, many workers are accepting harder working conditions against their will because of the prevailing economic situation of high unemployment levels. But for government to fail for whatever reasons to pay pension entitlements to retirees is simply unacceptable," says Muweme.

One may ask, what kind of a society we are that can allow such situations to occur? Do we really care about each other? It is important that government takes the lead and show exemplary behaviour in caring for the workers during the time they are actively engaged in employment, but more importantly government must take care of those retiring by paying them promptly their benefits.

The JCTR further says that the current situation of pensioners is reminiscent of the eras of slavery and colonialism, where there was an absence of a *social conscience* by certain sections of society to get troubled of the injustice committed to fellow human beings.

Increases in the price of petrol undoubtedly hurt the national economy in various ways, but it is those on the lower ladder of our society, the poor that will feel the greatest impact.

Indeed our socioeconomic situations in the country demand some strong *moral* and *ethical* approaches to redressing them. Zambia should strive to build a political, economic and social order that will place the well being of human beings above anything else. Without such a moral and ethical approach even today's fight against poverty and the struggle for the attainment of Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) will be very difficult to realize. Do we sometimes wonder why we have so many children on the streets beyond the HIV/AIDS problem?

[For more information, contact Muweme Muweme, Social Conditions Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, P.O. BOX 37774, Lusaka, Zambia; tel: 260-1-290410; e-mail: socialjctr@zamnet.zm; internet: www.jctr.org.zm]