**BNB Press Release 10th October, 2017.**

**Social protection amount not sufficient to alleviate poverty in Zambia**

On the 29th of September, 2017 Honorable Felix C. Mutati, MP Minister of Finance presented the 2018 national budget to parliament. With the theme “Accelerating fiscal fitness for sustained inclusive growth, without leaving anyone behind.” He said the 2018 budget will be aligned to the five pillars of the Seventh National Development Plan. As an institution that speaks for the poor, we wish to reflect on the 2018 budget in the context of pillar number two of Poverty and vulnerability reduction.

In line with this pillar, Government has promised in 2018 to continue implementing policies, programmes and initiatives that are aimed at protecting and empowering vulnerable members in our communities. This is commendable as it is critical to the very important theme of the budget of not leaving any one behind. The economy has been growing in the last decade but with little to show for with regard to poverty and inequality reduction. Despite this lofty ambition, the budgetary allocation to social protection, specifically allocation to public service fund had reduced from K1.6 million in 2017 to K1.1 million. There is need to ensure that retirees are taken care of and do not slide into poverty when they stop work. JCTR further notes with concern that the non-upwards adjustment of tax free threshold will harm employees whose salaries have remained stagnant coupled with high cost of living.

The **September 2017** JCTR **Basic Needs Basket** (BNB) for a family of **five** living in **Lusaka** stood at **K4,883.57** which is **K44.8** less than the **August** BNB which was at **K4,928.37**. The decrease in the BNB could be attributed to reduced costs in some food items which include; **mealie meal** reduced from **K62.33 per 25 kg** bag to **K59.85 per 25kg bag**, **Kapenta** reduced from **K202.8 per kg to K184.78 per kg**. **Fish** reduced from **K134.83 per kg** to **K132.56 per kg**. Other commodities like **Beans** increased from **K26.87 per Kg** to **K30.57 per kg**, **Tomatoes** increased from **K8 per kg** to **k9 per kg**, **tea** increased from **K83 per kg** to **K91.2 per kg**. Mealie meal prices continue to decrease because of the good farming season we had and prices of kapenta have reduced because of its increased supply in the market.

Despite this moderate decrease in cost of living, JCTR wishes to remind Government that the cost of living remains high as most people’s incomes fall below the average BNB. Therefore more measures should be put in place for the budget theme to be realized. JCTR however acknowledges increased allocation to social cash transfer from K552 million in 2017 to K721 million in 2018. We urge Government to be more targeting in identifying beneficiaries of the social cash transfer and other social protection measures if the intended benefits have to be realized. The Implementation of the electronic Single Registry of beneficiaries for all social protection programmes is thus a welcome move as it will ensure that only the deserving beneficiaries access social protection.

**Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, P.O. Box 37774, 10101 Lusaka, Zambia**

**Tel: 260-211-290-410 Fax: 260-211-290-759 E-mail: basicjctr@jesuits.org.zm Website: www.jctr.org.zm**

**Location: 3813 Martin Mwamba Road, Olympia Park, Lusaka**