**January 2014 Press Release**

**Title: Government should seriously consider the rising cost of living, says the JCTR**

**Alternative title: Government should pay attention to the signs of the times, as cost of living rises, says the JCTR**

The recent statement by the Minister of Finance on the debt status of the economy is a cause for concern, in that even though the government is committed to reducing the fiscal deficit to no more than 3% of GDP over the medium term the external debt stood at US $3.1 billion in 2013 which is relatively high. This is an issue that the current Patriotic Front government needs to take seriously. The down side to this phenomenon is that the social crisis will be manifested in the increasing inability on the part of the majority of Zambians to have access to the basic needs. The Church Social Teaching provides guidelines for Christian conduct in the political, economic and social life of society and the way in which it should be structured for people to enjoy a full and dignified life.

As a centre in all our work we are guided by the CST and our work draws us to a special concern for the poor and the vulnerable in society in light of the Basic Needs Basket. The government must look at more effective ways of addressing the current escalating food prices and Poverty reduction must be the number one agenda and the motive behind all the policy statements.

The 2014 January Basic Needs Basket for Lusaka stood at K3, 605.01. This is an increase from the previous month of December which stood at K3, 538.54 by K66.47. This could be attributed mainly due to the increase in the price of Kapenta. There has been a significant increase in the price of Kapenta from K139.42 to K220.42 signifying an increase of about K80.00. This is quite a leap and could be attributed to the annual fishing ban that lasts for three months from December to March.

The price of mealie meal continues to rise by K0.86 from K68.57 to K69.00. Therefore considering that majority of the households depend on this staple food, the government needs to insure that the increase in salaries should meet the cost of living in order for people to enjoy the full benefits of the increment. The wage increase must ensure decent and dignified livelihoods for the people.

The price of beef has also shown a slight increase of about K3. This is partly because of the pork ban that meant majority of the people where purchasing and consuming a lot of beef. There is has been a minimal decrease in the price of charcoal of about K1 but however this price is likely to increase due to the transportation and other difficulties associated with its production during the rainy season. As parliament will be resuming its sitting, we at the JCTR believe it is high time that the debates and decisions in Parliament be orientated towards issues that would help improve poor living conditions and ease the general suffering of the people.