

JCTR CALLS FOR MORE EFFORTS AT ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF EMPLOYMENT CREATION

Employment is very central in answering to the various social concerns Zambia currently faces. As such it should be one of the top most priority areas beyond what is currently obtaining in the country, observes the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) as Zambia celebrates Labour Day.

"As a matter of fact," says Muweme Muweme Coordinator of the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR, "within the context of efforts at fulfilling Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (which Zambia is significantly lagging behind), employment creation should be considered as one of the cardinal points of attention because of its relationship to the fulfilment of other rights such as education, health, decent housing, etc."

It is important to recognise that employment is a *first line necessity* through which individuals and households at large earn a living. What this implies is that a person who is not in employment is unable to meet his or her and family's material requirements such as those of adequate nutritional intake, education, housing, health, etc. But it also implies that he or she tends to experience a sense of social exclusion, inadequacy and most unfortunately the psychological pain of inability to provide for him or herself and family. "Large scale unemployment as the case is in Zambia today undermines the realisation of a strong and decent family, the foundational starting point of any community and the nation," says Muweme.

Since employment is such a central issue to the uplifting of individuals, households and entire communities, it becomes imperative that its creation should not only be left to the ingenuities of individuals -- as the case is in the informal sector -- but should be facilitated by the Zambian government through recognising above anything else that it has a *moral* responsibility to do so.

One of the deepest crises of our time is that in addition to a general situation of unemployment -- where less than six hundred thousand people are in formal employment compared to a population of around ten million -- and poor wages, there is a corresponding *incessant* challenge of an unaffordable high cost of living. The JCTR through its monthly *Basic Needs Basket* (measuring cost of living for a family of six in Livingstone, Lusaka, Kabwe, Ndola, Luanshya and Kitwe) has over the past years demonstrated this undesirable fact in our society and has called into question Zambia's development path.

For example, for the month of April, the cost of food alone was K482,820 in Lusaka. If we add housing, water, electricity, wash and bath soap, energy, etc., *without even* including the cost of education, transport, health, etc., the total *Basic Needs Basket* comes to K1,331,920 for Lusaka. This trend in cost of basic needs for Lusaka, with only a few exceptions such as in the cost of housing, can be said to be the same across Livingstone, Kabwe, Ndola, Luanshya and Kitwe.

The above statistics should compel us as a nation to realise, *first*, that the need for employment creation is very *paramount* for Zambia because of its direct link to the welfare of the people. *Second*, that it is not just creating employment in terms of numbers but it matters *what kind of employment* is being created. It must be that kind of employment that will enable people to earn an income that will make them meet essential requirements for decent survival. Indeed it should be that kind of employment that will contribute to both the fulfilment and enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by the majority of Zambian citizens. *Third*, with the recent experience of loss of life in Chambishi, it means not only looking at contractual issues surrounding the recruitment process, but also looking at the environment within which people are working. By and large, the work environment in most work-places in Zambia is such that it does not promote human dignity.

"As Zambia celebrates Labour Day," says Muweme, "social vices such as child labour, excessive exploitation of labour, poor standing of women in the work equation, delayed and inadequate remuneration, etc., are situations which call for deeper and thorough reflection coupled with taking pragmatic steps in addressing them. Above all they are moral issues whose continued prevalence calls into question the moral standing of policy makers and institutions at local, national and international levels."

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