

## **ZEC reflections on the year 2013 and 2014 expectations**

Thursday, 23 January 2014 12:25

Press Conference by the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC)

### **Salutation**

*Part of the bishops addressing Journalists during a press conference at Kapingila Guest house in Lusaka, 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2014.*

*Dear members of the Press and invited guests, New Year greetings from us, the Zambia Episcopal Conference.*

*On the occasion of our first plenary session in 2014, we have invited you here to share with you and through you with the nation our perspective of various issues that are affecting our country.*

### **1. Introduction**

*We thank the Almighty God for preserving our country in relative peace and unity throughout 2013.*

*We note with joy and gratitude to God that this year, our country is celebrating its golden jubilee of independence. This is a great achievement for our country. In this vein, we give thanks to God for his mercy on our country; we honour our founding fathers and mothers who sacrificed for our freedom and salute every individual Zambian for their personal contribution to the harmony we enjoy in our country, today. Scripture says; "Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called Children of God." Matthew 5: 9*

### **2. Issues for reflection.**

*As we start the New Year, it is incumbent upon us to share with the nation our reflexion on the year 2013 as well as our expectations for 2014*

*. The state of our country is the responsibility of all of us and therefore each one of us has*

*a duty to contribute to the wellbeing of people and harmony in our country. In a great measure, Zambians have lived up to this task and we urge them to continue.*

### **3. The Duty of Government**

*We thank God that since Zambia attained independence about 50 years ago in 1964, the country has had relatively stable successive governments elected by the people of Zambia in various political systems. Being elected by the people, this bestows great responsibility on the part of government. At all times, government must endeavour to work to promote the common wellbeing of all the people. We all know that the way government manages public affairs and exercises its stewardship of power invariably affects everyone in the country.*

*Therefore citizens expect their government, amongst other things, to be humble listeners to the people who are the real masters of governors; to promote integral development and to guarantee peace and political stability; to ensure that human rights are respected and that there are good health facilities and education system, and that majority people have access to such facilities, but above all that all citizens are treated with dignity and respect.*

### **4. Taking Stock in the New Year**

*As we start the New Year, we need to indeed take stock of our country so that we improve on what we are doing well and avoid the pitfalls that we have experienced in the past. We acknowledge the effort government is making to improve the welfare of the*

Zambian people and their dignity. We recognise, in particular, improvements to the economy and road infrastructure development in some parts of the country.

## **5. Challenges**

Notwithstanding the gains mentioned above, we note with deep concern that the strides Zambia could have made continue to be negated and eroded by governance arrogance of the know it all type. There is demonstration of lack of humility among some of our leaders and this has led to lack of stakeholder consultation when making decisions on key policy matters. Why is it that those who try to question certain practices are treated with scorn and humiliation? These are manoeuvres meant to intimidate people from participating in their own affairs and providing checks and balances in the governance of this country.

To date there are many unresolved issues and negative developments that are taking our country many years backwards. In our similar statement at the beginning of 2013, some of these governance concerns were raised, for instance:

- The hostile political environment in our country,
- The high incidence of by-elections,
- Lack of political integrity among our politicians and leaders,
- The selective application of the Public Order Act by the Zambia Police Service,
- The deteriorating human rights situation in our country,
- Intimidation and police repressions with regard to the Barotse issue in Western Province,

- The stalled constitution making process.

It's is sad that these concerns have continued to be unresolved even as we enter 2014. Today again we reiterate our concern on the same issues and many more and state where we as Zambia Episcopal Conference stand on those issues.

### **5.1 The need for co-existence, tolerance and respect in politics**

The dream of the return to multi-partism in 1991 should be enhanced by an acknowledgement that Zambia now has many political parties. It is normal, therefore, for the political atmosphere to be characterised by divergent views and political ideologies. In this respect, freedom of expression and association should not only be tolerated but should be allowed to flourish. We once again deplore the abuse and biased application of the Public Order Act by the Police Service.

The political environment in Zambia, today, is characterised by manipulation, patronage and intimidation of perceived government opponents. We urge the government to stop using state security institutions to intimidate its own nationals. The police service in particular must be professional and impartial in carrying out their duties of maintaining law and order. Too many of the nation's resources and time are wasted on politicking at the expense of real development. This culture must change for the better.

### **5.2 Unnecessary by-elections.**

We further lament the vast sums of money that have gone and continue to go into holding of by-elections. These funds could have given Zambians many schools and hospitals. We appeal to the whole country to seriously reflect on how best unnecessary by-

*elections can be avoided. We are aware that this is worsened by the stalled constitution making process that could have provided legal limitations to by-elections. That is why we demand putting back on track the constitution making process which will give Zambians a chance to resolve problems inherent in our governance processes like elections.*

### **5.3 The failure to pursue a predictable constitution making process after a spirited start in November 2011**

*It is imperative that the Government should decidedly set a legacy for itself by bringing this matter to a logical conclusion that is acceptable to all stakeholders.*

*We believe that the draft of the Technical Committee is a summation of the wishes and aspirations of the Zambian people. What needs to be done now is for the Government to take the necessary steps that will move this process forward as demanded by the people of Zambia. We cannot go the way of the Inquiries Act, whereby the President and his cabinet sit to cherry-pick what they think should be in the constitution. We have been down this route before where respective ruling parties have desired that the constitution be made in their party's image and likeness. This has always not worked and it will not work even now.*

*The people of Zambia are demanding nothing less than a constitution given to themselves by themselves. The final draft Constitution prepared by the Justice Silungwe technical committee should without further delay be released to the public and other stakeholders, consistent with the roadmap announced by the Constitution Technical Committee at the commencement*

*of its mandate. The people have spoken many times over the years and even now; they want the constitution adopted through a referendum, Vox Populi, Vox dei, "the voice of the people is the voice of God". We reject the excuse of expenses given the fact that the country has lost huge amounts of money in the botched processes of the past. Now we have a chance to resolve this long standing constitution issue in a more sustainable way. This chance should not be allowed to yet again pass.*

### **5.4 Food Security Situation**

*The food security situation of the country is at threat and it has been escalated by the late delivery of farming inputs particularly fertiliser for the 2013/2014 farming season. There has been a nationwide cry on the late delivery of farming inputs. This delay is likely to negatively affect this year's maize harvest. Unfortunately, this comes at a time of increased mealie meal prices, which have partly been caused by the removal of subsidies on maize and fuel which has in turn resulted in the high cost of living. Many families are seriously struggling to make ends meet. We call on Government to mitigate the suffering of its people. Further, we hope that this year, 2014, the government will avoid delays in distributing farming inputs. The Government should seriously explore remedial measures to mitigate the impact of high mealie meal prices on the poor.*

### **5.5 The failure to engage constructively with traditional leaders in order to resolve disagreements**

*There are a number of outstanding issues involving traditional leaders that are almost threatening their status in the Zambian*

society. At the root of this is the behaviour of some politicians trying to interfere with traditional institutions. Traditional affairs and conflicts related to succession should be resolved by set customs, procedures and systems within the traditional structures with recourse to the courts of law when need be. Government should only come in when such systems violate state laws and human rights.

### **5.6 The role of the media in Zambia**

The value of having a thriving professional media cannot be over emphasised. The media play a big role as the fourth estate by educating and informing the public. We deplore the practice of harassing media personnel by some members of the public when these noble men and women are on duty. Government must put in measures to protect media personnel.

As ZEC, we are also concerned about the way government is dragging its feet in enacting the Freedom of Information Bill. This matter has been outstanding for a long time through successive regimes clearly as a result of lack of political will. We want to see this law enacted in this jubilee year.

On the other hand, the media should objectively, accurately and truthfully bring out issues as they are. Unfortunately, we are seeing a media environment in Zambia that is highly polarised and compartmentalised along political preferences. This has deeply undermined the integrity of our media. We call upon both the public and private media to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and ethics.

### **5.7 Standoff with striking/fired nurses**

So much commentary and blame apportioning has been made by stakeholders on the

standoff between government and the nurses. For us the only losers are the poor people who have died and continue to die due to lack of attention by our health institutions. People were dying when nurses went on strike and they continue to die now when government has punished the nurses by firing them. This is surely a no win situation for the patients who are suffering in our hospitals, Therefore government must play a leading role in adopting a more reconciliatory approach in the resolution of this situation that continues to endanger the lives of citizens. We want to encourage dialogue and solutions that put the interest of patients first.

### **6. Governing by decrees**

In our past statements in 2013, we consistently appealed to government to promote a culture of consultation as a basis of policy and decision making. Ruling by decrees is not only undemocratic but also denies our country the benefit of bright ideas that could be offered by many citizens not in positions of decision making. Some decrees have led to policies that raise great challenges to implement. In the past we have talked about decrees on creation of a multitude of districts; today it is the issue of using local languages as a mode of instruction at lower primary in our schools and then the issue of SI No. 103.

#### **6.1 Introduction of local languages as a medium of instruction at lower primary in our school:**

Already the directive to use local languages as medium of instruction in our lower primary schools is proving to be a major challenge with respect to implementation. Teachers are not enough or trained to cater for the language diversity of our country. It is

*also unjust and a violation of human rights to force children to learn in local languages that are not their native languages. This arrangement will definitely advantage children who are native speakers of the language of instruction above their peers who are not. We urge government to immediately withdraw this policy and engage in real consultations on it.*

### **6.2 The Statutory Instrument No. 103 of 2013**

*The revocation of the tax exemption for Public Benefit Organisations and Non- State charitable actors such as the Church through the Statutory Instrument No. 103 of 2013 is seriously ill advised. The implementation of this policy decision in our view is punishing the majority poor who are the beneficiaries of the services offered by the Church and other charity institutions. If the decision on SI 103 is not reversed, it will be impossible to offer social services as the Church is doing now. Therefore as ZEC, it is regrettable that we may be forced to disengage from offering social services such as health, education, vocational training, home based care and hospices due to diminished capacity occasioned by the implementation of SI 103. The implication of this is that the poor who are the main beneficiaries of the services of the Church will suffer as they will be deprived of essential social services provided by donations from overseas through local charities. We urge the Government to seriously reconsider and reinstate the previous procedure which provided appropriate criteria for clearance.*

### **7. The Golden Jubilee of Independence**

*As we celebrate the golden jubilee of Zambia's political independence, we appeal to all citizens to reshape Zambia into a country full of great prosperity. We also call for the nation to use the Golden Jubilee to foster dialogue, reconciliation and social justice. Let it be a year of renewal, self-cleansing and reconstruction.*

*We also urge the government to quickly give clear direction and programme of events and activities that will be carried out during 2014 to mark the commemoration of the golden jubilee of Zambia's independence. In this way, the nation will fully own the celebration and participate fully.*

### **8. Conclusion**

*As Zambia Episcopal Conference, we give these views on the state of our nation with great humility and deep concern for the people of Zambia. We mean well and we pray for Zambia to be a successful democracy. It is our hope that this year will make a difference in the way we do our politics. We look forward to the resolution of many unresolved issues that we have highlighted in this press conference this morning –issues to do with our republican constitution, matters with traditional rulers, delays in the distribution of farming inputs, by-elections, lack of consultation on policy issues (e.g. education and SI 103) and acrimony in our political landscape to name but a few.*

*Members of the press, distinguished invited guests, Thank you for your attendance. May God bless our great country.*

*Issued at Kapingila ZEC House, Lusaka, Zambia on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2013*

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