



## **LET THERE BE PEACE AMONG US**

*“I will make peace flow to her like a river ...” (Isaiah 66:12)*

### **Pastoral Statement on the State of the Nation 2016**

To all Catholics and people of good will in Zambia!

We greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **PREAMBLE**

1. As is our tradition, we hold the first plenary meeting in January of every year. It is the moment of grace during which we reflect and deliberate on our task as shepherds of the flock of the Catholic faithful in Zambia. In addition, we seize the occasion to review and evaluate the context within which we exercise our ministry of evangelization in order to discern our relevance to society as a Church. As pastors of the Church and teachers in the matters of faith and morals, we always feel duty bound to teach on issues affecting our faithful and the people of good will, for *“woe to us if we do not preach the word of God in and out of season”* (1 Cor 9:16; 2 Tim 4:2).

2. As we begin 2016, we thank God for the gift of life and for the enduring sustenance he bestows on us and his gracious mercy. We thank God for the relative peace in our country even when we sometimes take it for granted and engage in behaviours that threaten our God given gift of peace.

3. This year, should be an opportunity for reflection as individuals and communities to commit ourselves to the cause of promoting the common good. We also need to do an honest soul searching to discern our successes, missed opportunities and mistakes so that the product of our honest reflection becomes our stepping stone for a successful 2016.

4. Our country is moving towards tripartite elections. Zambians should be looking forward to this occasion with joy and great expectation. Ideally, elections are supposed to provide an opportunity of choosing our desired representatives in Councils, Parliament and a President of our choice in peace and tranquillity. Zambia does not lack experience in elections having returned to competitive multiparty elections twenty five years ago in 1991. The August 2016 tripartite elections will be the fifth major election even without including the numerous by-elections Zambia has had at all levels.

5. Whereas we have pulled through all these elections, the political culture that persistently clouds our election does not depict a maturing democracy and maturing democrats. Zambian politicians still suffer from a gross hangover of a one party state mentality where the essence of political competition was seen as the quest to annihilate their opponents completely and at all cost. Zambia is paying a great price through

political hooliganism and apparently the leadership in all our political parties has failed to uproot political violence. In some cases they actually seem to encourage and fan it by inflammatory speeches. We also don't see perpetrators of violence in political parties punished by their own leadership. Police must sternly but impartially apply the law to quell violence. We appeal for a new political spirit and a democratic culture among our political leaders and their members. Let us make 2016 different in terms of providing a better and tolerant political environment.

## **OUR HOPES AND CONCERNS FOR 2016**

### **Political Landscape**

6. We applaud the nation that, even with the persistent culture of intolerance in our politics, Zambia is still a functional multiparty democracy with a plural political environment where the space for citizen participation through organized groups is possible.

7. We however decry the failure by the Zambian people to assume a rooted democratic culture of tolerating each others' views and political choices. Political parties in Zambia have failed to show good democratic credentials which they should put into practice. Coming from 2015 into 2016, what we often hear from political leaders is vulgar language and hate speech against each other. This does not give us hope for a clean and peaceful electoral process as we go towards the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016 tripartite elections. Political party leaders at all levels must commit

themselves to a peaceful electoral process and the control of their members.

8. When Zambia returned to multiparty politics in 1991, there were high expectations from the public for legal reforms to create laws that are consistent with the new democratic dispensation. After so many aborted processes and huge expenditure of public resources, the President took a bold step and assented to the amendments of our Republican Constitution on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2016. This was despite the unresolved contest with stakeholders on the process and mode of adoption. The question now arises as to what next? Government has not given any road map for the post assenting period with respect to the application of the new Constitution. Even as we move towards August elections, the new Constitution has implications that impinge on the elections and this should be looked at. There is already a fierce, speculative and uninformed debate in the public domain on the contents of the new constitution, its implications and ramifications. The public needs to be informed and educated on this.

9. Further, even when the constitution has been assented to, there have been no efforts to make it easily accessible and affordable to the majority Zambians. Only a few privileged people have had access to it. The questions we are asking are: For whom is this constitution meant? Is it only for a few elite or all citizens countrywide? What about the majority in the rural areas most of whom are in extreme poverty? What about those who cannot read English? If the President made this constitutional assent in good faith, we appeal to him to prevail over

relevant ministries and government departments to popularize the new constitution and publicise the post assent constitutional roadmap.

10. Prior to the enactment of the constitution, the government promised the public that those articles that would be left out shall be subjected to the referendum that would run concurrently with the tripartite elections. We are concerned that the government is now changing its position on the question of holding the referendum concurrently with tripartite elections. Sadly, the Bill of Rights has been sidelined. Many of the constitutional changes we need to make that could improve the people's quality of life and dignity hinge on reforming the bill of rights. It is imperative that a clear and well defined roadmap on the proposed referendum be presented to the nation.

11. We are very concerned about the selective application of the Public Order Act by the Police Service. In many cases, it is applied almost always in favour of the ruling party and those they favour. This disadvantages opposition political parties. It is a shame that 25 years after returning to multiparty politics and 52 years after independence, the Public Order Act is still with us as a bequest from the British colonial era which designed it for the oppression of political opponents. What really are our law reforms focusing on? Is it not to deal with this obnoxious colonial piece of legislation?

12. A new dangerous phenomenon that has cropped up in the Zambian politics is that of regionalism and tribalism. Our founding mothers and fathers invested a lot of energy to ensure that Zambians see and treat each other as brothers and sisters regardless of tribe, race or religion.

Why should this be an issue in our politics today? Nobody chose or chooses which tribe they are born in. It is our God-given identity but with a common factor that we are all born in his image and likeness (Cf. Gen 1: 26 – 27). We should all be proud of our ethnic roots and love each other as God's children. **No tribe is more valuable or important than the other.** What makes us great is our unity in diversity and we should all thank God for it.

13. We are aware that this whole tribal and ethnic talk is fanned by politicians for selfish reasons of political expediency. Politicians must bear in mind that if Zambia is set on fire, they will have nobody to govern.

### **Economic Ills and their Social Ramifications**

14. From 1991, Zambia adopted a liberal economy with the promise to bring back the economy to prosperity and dignified lives for majority of Zambians. Poverty levels, particularly rural poverty, have escalated.

15. The transition from 2015 into 2016 can be classified as a challenging period in as far as livelihoods of Zambians is concerned. The cost of living has gone up due to escalation in inflation. We are experiencing massive loss of jobs for bread winners and households are being left with no income. Although the major cause in the slump of the economy has been attributed to external factors, and while appreciating what the government is doing to offset the challenge, this situation must be arrested locally.

16. We have said before that an economy should serve the people and not the other way round (Catholic Bishops of Zambia, Pastoral Letter *"Hear the cry of the poor"*, 1993 # 18). The success of any economy should not just be measured through GDP growth but the positive effect on the livelihoods of people and the narrowing of the gap between the rich and the poor. This is a mark of success of any particular economy.

17. Whereas we hear excuses from leaders as to the cause of this predicament, we are also seeing bad stewardship and lack of prudence in the way public resources are being managed. Government should demonstrate commitment to good stewardship of financial resources during this time. It should walk the talk.

18. We also strongly appeal to all companies and employers that before retrenchments are carried out, other measures to achieve financial solvency must be attempted. It is morally unjustified to deprive someone of the opportunity for work without attempting alternative measures that can mitigate job losses. It appears that at times, workers in the mining industry are being held at ransom as human shields for the companies to negotiate favourable tax regimes with government. Government must at all time have its priority to protect its people.

### **A Duty of All to Our Common Home**

19. Zambia is experiencing unfavourable rain pattern. This pattern shows that the country's food security will be under extreme pressure. In the case of calamity such as this, we urge the Zambian Government to plan ahead so that no Zambian citizen should go without food this year.

The relevant government ministries should mobilize resources to assist those who will be in dire need of help. However, food relief should be not used to gain political mileage. We call for solidarity on those who will have surplus, as we are urged by the St. James the Apostle to demonstrate our faith by works of mercy, especially the work of sharing with the needy (James 2: 14-23).

20. The climate change calls us to re-examine the way we take care of our common home, the earth. Pope Francis cautions us that if we do not take personal as well as corporate responsibility for the earth which is our home, we will destroy the home for our future generation. He invites all of us to cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, in order to protect our environment (*Laudato si*, 2015, #14).

21. We are concerned that some multinational companies are indiscriminately using our natural resources to satisfy the markets leaving behind great human and environmental liabilities such as the depletion of natural resources, pollution and deforestation. Government must put in place strong monitoring measures to monitor the exploitation of natural resources in Zambia by investors both foreign and local.

22. As we have stated before (Pastoral statement, “*That they may have abundant life*”, 2012 # 13), it is imperative that mining and logging companies contribute to a natural resources fund that could be used to resuscitate the depleted environment in a more tangible and enduring manner for the benefit of us since we are experiencing the effect of the environmental crisis.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Political Parties and Politicians**

23. We want to see genuine commitment to democratic values from all political parties. All political leaders should renounce violence and hate speech. They must educate their members to respect other players and recognize their rights. They should focus on issues in their campaigns rather than making personal attacks. Political parties must choose candidates of good standing who are committed to the promotion of the common good.

### **The Government**

24. The Government is responsible for the welfare of Zambians. Among the duties of the government are; to guarantee peace and security for all, to respect people's liberties and to promote a genuine and non-discriminatory rule of law. We urge our leaders in government to be the torch-bearers in the promotion of true reconciliation and peace. In this election year, we appeal to the Government and to the ruling party to realize that they have a serious responsibility to ensure that the concerns of all key players are adequately addressed.

### **District Commissioners**

25. At the time the office of the District Commissioner (DC) was created, the nation was informed that these appointees would be civil servants and not politicians. Even when their role and value is still obscure to the

public, we see the DCs as full time politicians of the ruling party. They act and work as party cadres wherever they are and using government resources. Their role in this electoral process must be watched and seriously scrutinised.

## **The Youth**

26. Youths are supposed to be leaders of tomorrow but they have to start exercising leadership today. We advise the youths to claim their genuine political space in the electoral process. They should refuse to be used as mere tools of violence by politicians. We appeal to the youth to accept and tolerate divergent views.

## **The Media**

27. We call upon the media to be professional by reporting truthfully, objectively and factually as they inform the public. We urge them to provide equitable coverage in the electoral process and avoid being fronts of partisan politics. We want to see a media landscape that is not polarized where the public media is pro-ruling party while the private media is pro-opposition parties.

28. We urge the public media to be professional, ensure full and fair coverage of all political parties. We also want to see a private and community based media that remain professional, accommodative and inclusive in its covering of issues. Whichever media platform one uses, should not fuel hate speech or insults in the name of the right to freely

express oneself. We also want a responsible use and reception of social media.

## **The Church**

29. The role of the Church is to be the conscience of the nation. We urge all Christians to use their prophetic voice in their communities to promote unity in the country. We urge them to refuse any politician to use their churches and liturgical functions as campaign forums. It is the duty of all Christians to use their prophetic voice to denounce all forms of fraud in the electoral process. As we have stated before: “All the members of the Church must strive to ensure that the gospel values of love, reconciliation, tolerance, social justice, fairness, the common good, and equality are promoted in our political and economic life” (Cf. Catholic Bishops, *Pastoral letter: Building for Peace*, 1996 # 12).

30. We call upon our fellow church leaders to remain non-partisan yet vigilant. They must also keep the prophetic voice alive to denounce all forms of electoral malpractice and political violence.

31. Likewise, we appeal particularly to our own catholic priests to remain non-partisan. The Church law is very clear on this (Cf. Canon Law 285 and Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2442). It is morally wrong for the catholic priest to use the pulpit to campaign for, or de-campaign any political party or parties. In as much as we welcome Catholic politicians to celebrate Mass with us, they must not give them any platform to speak during liturgical celebrations.

## Special Appeal

32. We call upon our brothers and sisters to take this year as the year of tolerance and love. In the words St. Paul the Apostle, we make a special appeal to you to *“make [our] joy complete by being of a single mind, one in love, one in heart and one in mind. Nothing is to be done out of jealousy or vanity; instead, out of humility of mind everyone should give preference to others, everyone pursuing not self-interest but those of others”* (Phi 2:2-4). Above all *“do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody”* (Rm 12:18).

We end with the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi:

*“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.*

*O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.”*

May the peace of the Lord remain with you all!

**Issued at Kapingila House, Lusaka, Zambia on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2016 and signed by:**

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- + Rt. Rev. Raymond Mpezele – Bishop of Livingstone
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