

# **CAN PROMISES BECOME REALITIES?**

Peter Henriot

Old fairy tales always begin with the words, “Once upon a time...” But new fairy tales begin with the words, “If elected, I promise and promise and promise...!”

That was the good election joke published in THE POST several days before last Thursday’s historic election. And now we are going to get a chance to see whether all the fuss and furor of the past several weeks of presidential electioneering are only fairy tales or are they going to turn out to be true stories. Both Mr. Banda and Mr. Sata competed heavily in the promise business.

But now, can President Banda, newly inaugurated on Sunday afternoon, turn all his many promises into realities? Or have the Zambian people once again been cheated by lying and conniving and disrespectful candidates for high office who promise the moon but deliver nothing?

## **GOOD AND BAD PROMISES**

Making promises during an election campaign can have both a good side and a bad side.

For the good side, a candidate making plenty of promises about fuel promises, fertiliser prices, teachers in schools, medicines in clinics, good jobs for everyone, new investments, etc., etc., tells us a lot about his vision and hopes for Zambia. He commits himself to an agenda, a programme, a plan for action. By making these promises, he lets people, the potential voters, know what he stands for. And in so doing, he opens himself up for a process of “monitoring and evaluation” (M&E) that everyone should be involved in to see how honest a person he really is!

On the other hand, making a lot of promises has a bad side, since it can simply be a ploy, a deceit, a trick, to win votes. The promises are plainly unrealistic and could never be followed up in the current Zambian situation. At least the money and time simply aren’t there to do everything that we have heard in the campaign speeches of the past several weeks. In effect, the candidates have in many instances been insulting the people by taking them for granted that voting wouldn’t be done seriously and with the good of the whole nation in view.

The only way we are going to know whether the President-elect’s many promises are going to be meaningful for the majority of Zambians in the near future is to set up a very good M&E process and hold him to strict accountability. Let me suggest three clear steps for that M&E process.

## **PRIORITIES OF PROMISES**

First, within two weeks after his inauguration as fourth Republican President, the new man in State House should appear on national television and radio (with inserts in the national newspapers) to present a specific agenda that clearly lays out his priorities and plans and policies for the first year in office. Remember, these shouldn’t be promises – he has already won the election! But they should represent realistic commitments as to what is really going to shape all his decisions.

Obviously, these realistic commitments should have some relationship to his campaign promises. Otherwise he will have to humbly admit that he lied to the people in order to get the votes necessary for the number one job!

Let him tell the Zambian people which sections of the country will get first attention and why, what Ministries will be focused on for some very quick results in improving the national good, and which programmes he will personally emphasise as essential to real integral development in Zambia.

For example, where will the feeder roads be constructed or rehabilitated to enhance food production? How many teachers will be given the accommodations necessary to keep them in schools instructing the future of the country? And what money is he putting into the 2009 Budget to assure conclusion of a good constitutional process that brings Zambians economic, social and cultural rights?

## **REPORTS ABOUT PROMISES**

Second, this national presentation by the new President of his agenda should then be followed up by clear reports every six months of his time in State House. These reports will lay out what really has been done -- or has not been done, with some straightforward account of why it has not been done.

This is an M&E process that can tell us whether he is really in State House to serve the people or simply to serve himself, his family, his friends and his party. Let that report be given the wide media coverage that he bought during the campaign when he was promising so many good things as a consequence of his getting the votes of hardworking Zambian citizens.

What such an M&E process will do is to provide a candid account of his fulfillment or non-fulfillment of all those wonderful campaign promises. Yes, some things probably won't be on schedule or may even have been dropped or significantly changed. O.K., then let there be an explanation of what is happening. The citizens of Zambia deserve the respect of such a candid explanation.

When implemented as a regular six-month report, this M&E will show whether or not he and his party are fulfilling their many promises. Mr. Banda, why would any honest President shy away from such a programme of full reporting to the people whom you swore to serve when you were inaugurated?

## **CHOICE OF CABINET MEMBERS**

A third way we are going to be able to tell whether the newly elected President is a man of honour or not is according to the appointments he will make to his new Cabinet.

Is Honourable So-and-So really appointed Minister of Such-and-Such because of the qualities of her or his mind and heart, or because it is a "reward" for delievering votes from a particular section of the country. Or does the person get the job because he is a relative or next of kin ("family trees" do seem to have a good soil for growth in Zambia!).

What about the proposed appointee's record regarding corruption? Yes, it is certainly true that everyone is innocent until proven guilty. But it is hard, very hard, to justify a person's being appointed to a high position while actually being on trial, or being recommended for trial, for disgraceful corruption that has hurt the good people of Zambia!

Indeed, the quality of cabinet appointments will very soon tell us a lot about the new President's integrity. Promises are in the air, but appointments are on the ground – for better or worse!

### **FROM PROMISES INTO REALITIES**

There has been a lot of campaign talk about “legacies.” I feel it is much more important now to talk about the actual priorities of whoever has been elected. For elections are extremely expensive, not only in terms of money spent but of values raised. The value of the candidate, the value of the electorates, the value of the future.

One way we will see very soon whether the value has been worth it all is how the new President lets us know what he intends to do to make those campaign promises become programme realities. Let's keep some good citizenry M&E operating to make the judgments necessary about the real character of the man who has moved into State House.

No more promises, just some realities!

phenriot@jesuits.org.zm

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Peter Henriot  
Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection  
Lusaka, Zambia

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