

*BNB Press Statement*

6<sup>th</sup> September, 2018.

**Weather fluctuations play a major role on cost of basic food commodities**

In the recent past, between January and June Zambia experienced a crisis in increased prices of tomatoes and onion on the market. During that period a box of tomatoes at Soweto market was costing above K100. The exorbitant price of tomatoes and onions affected thousands of families throughout the country because the two commodities are basic necessities in households. The cost of tomatoes and onions increased from K9 in January to K17 in April per Kg and from K9 in January to K13 in April respectively. Reduced supply in tomatoes and onions during that period was attributed to poor rainfall pattern.

Releasing the August 2018 Basic Needs Basket (BNB), the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), has observed that a box of tomatoes and onions in Soweto market is currently selling at K25 and K35 respectively. The favourable prices of these two agriculture produce on the market have been attributed to high supply emanating from favourable farming conditions. However, the Centre has noted that the cost of living for a family of five living in Lusaka has remained high at **K5,402.31, reflecting an increase of K146** from the July figure of **K5,256.29**. Significant increases in prices were noted in Kapenta which increased by **K78** from **K152** in July to **K230** in August per kg whilst a Kilogram of **Beans** increased by **K3** from **K29** in July to **K32** in August. Reductions were recorded in the prices of **Beef** by **K8** from **K39** in July to **K31** in August per kg. A kilogram of **tomatoes** decreased by **K2** from **K5** in July to **K3** in August per kg.

Access to food is a basic human right and thus important for good health and ultimately for life itself. The JCTR is however concerned that despite reductions recorded in commodity prices such as tomatoes and onions, the cost of living has remained high and unaffordable for most households. The Centre is further dismayed that despite scoring a good harvest in the production of tomatoes and onions, most of the produce is going to waste. This is largely attributed to infrastructure constraints related to poor transport, storage, processing, packaging facilities and importation of tomatoes and onions on the market.

The JCTR is there calling on Government to expedite promotion of value addition in the country, through activities such as production planning, sorting and research. The Centre is further urging government to improvise storage facilities and infrastructure in areas of production, for example more feeder roads should be provided to allow producers to have easier access to markets. The Centre is also urging government to embrace regional integration which will enhance exports and create market for excess food commodities. Further, the JCTR has urged government to promote constant adequate supply of basic essentials such as tomatoes, Kapenta, etc. but more also to facilitate that they are produced at a low cost and their production widely spread in most corners of the country. The Centre feels such a measure would help to contain the skyrocketing cost of living.

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