

Press Release

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WHAT AN INSPIRING SPEECH – NOW WE WAIT FOR ITS ACTUALIZATION

The speech by his Excellency, President Hakainde Hichilema during the ceremonial opening of the 1st Session of the 13th National Assembly was very inspiring and addressed all the major issues affecting this country. From the faith dimension and social justice perspective, there is a lot from HH's speech that calls for a deeper reflection.

Every Zambian of good will must laud HH's consistency in calling for unity and peaceful co-existence. A call for unity from ethno- and geo-centric perspective emphasizes that we are one despite diversity in ethnicity, race or place of origin. From anthropocentric and theological perspective, humanity has the same origin having been created by God in God's own image. The unity that Zambians are aspiring for under the new administration is a social-economic equity where the national cake of this richly endowed country is shared by all Zambians. In this context, what divides us is not only diversity in ethnicity or political affiliation but also socio-economic disparities that have divided one people into two societies of "the haves" and "the have-nots". There can be no unity and peaceful co-existence as long as we continue to have high levels of inequality in this country with the majority of the Zambians living in extreme poverty. It is therefore exciting to hear HH promising that his administration is going to reduce various forms of inequality and create a more equitable society.

Good governments all over the world invest in their own people. The pronouncements made by the new administration are very encouraging as they are people-centered. In his speech HH, acknowledges the need to transform the economy to create jobs and reduce poverty by investing in job rich sectors of agriculture, mining, tourism, energy, commerce and industry, green economy, transport as well as information and communication technology. It is heartening to note that the Zambian people who live in rural areas and in peri-urban areas, who form the bulk of our population, have taken a center stage in HH's speech with plans to invest heavily in agriculture through which most people in Zambia derive their livelihood and with plans to focus on micro, small, medium enterprises (SMSs) to create a critical mass of entrepreneurs, especially among the youth.

The new administration also pledges to invest in people by improving access to education, health, social protection as well as water and sanitation. Allocation to the social sector in Zambia has drastically reduced the past 10 years. It is therefore sobering to hear the new administration is pledging to invest in the social sector so that Zambian citizenry is skilled, health and empowered to participate in the socio-economic transformation agenda. The devil is in the detail of how education curriculum will be reviewed with emphasis placed on entrepreneurship; how higher education loan and bursary scheme will be reformed to support deserving learners; how inequalities in health service delivery, especially between rural and urban areas will be addressed; how the delivery of the existing social protection programmes will be streamlined to ensure that they are effective and efficient; and how livelihood programmes aimed at empowering women and young people will be efficiently implemented.

Good governments pay attention to governance issues. HH's pronouncements in matters of governance are very reassuring. Zero tolerance policy on corruption in all its forms is progressive with clear policy direction by introduction of specialized fast-track stolen assets recovery mechanisms and

courts for corruption and economic crimes. Decentralization and devolution of various central government functions to provinces, districts and constituencies has been long overdue. HH's administration pledges to accelerate the implementation of decentralization of functions from central government to the local authorities with matching resources. The promise to broaden tax base for revenue collection and lower individual tax burden is progressive although no percentage range was given. The promise to enact legislation on access to information is very welcome given that Access to Information Bill of 2002 has never been enacted into a law to-date despite endless advocacy efforts by various stakeholders to have such a legislation in Zambia to enhance transparency and accountability.

To address the debt crisis and the widening fiscal deficit, HH's administration has pledged to immediately stop excessive public expenditure as a way of halting further accumulation of debt. There is a commitment to debt restructuring and sustainability. To enhance debt management and transparency, the new administration has promised to streamline reporting of debt to ensure full disclosure and strengthen public investment management. The new administration has also promised to repeal and replace the Loans and Guarantees (Authorization) Act, CAP. 366 of the Laws of Zambia, to bring it in line with the Constitution. This is very progressive agenda as various stakeholders have tirelessly been lobbying for this since 2016.

The pledge to respect the rule of law and separation of powers among three arms of government is very progressive given that the current constitution gives the executive too much power, and in so doing undermine the separation of power. With respect to the constitutional reforms, HH's administration promises to complete constitutional reform agenda, anchored on a broad-based consensus among all Zambians. Further, there is pledge to revive the process of expanding the Bill of Rights to integrate economic, social and cultural rights. This is definitely a very progressive agenda although there is no hint at a possible roadmap to achieve it. There is also a commitment to reform the Public Order Act to facilitate its fair application and prevent abuse. Again there no a timeframe attached within which this will be achieved.

In the final analysis, HH's speech was brilliant and struck right codes in all the areas. But Zambians have been treated to brilliant speeches before. Will HH and his team be different? Will HH and his team walk the talk? The nation is willing to give the new administration the benefit of the doubt as people wait to see how these brilliant ideas are going be implemented with clear targets that will be periodically be measured by all the stakeholders. The nation expects nothing less from the 8th National Development Plan which is promised to be a robust economic transformation agenda that will deliver on the national vision and the aspirations of the citizens. The nation's appetite is now whetted, and the Zambian people are now looking forward to presentation of the 2022 national budget to see how the policy measures outlines in the President's speech will begin to be actualized.

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