

PRESS STATEMENT – REMOVAL OF MEAL ALLOWANCES FROM PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

AN EDUCATED POPULATION IS ESSENTIAL TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

On 6th February 2019, the Minister of higher education Professor Nkandu Luo announced that "Meal allowances for all public universities would be abolished and that students on the bursary scheme would only receive tuition fee, accommodation fees, book allowance and project expenses. She said the move was taken to scale up resources for the loan scheme to 5 other public universities namely; Kapasa Makasa, Mulungushi, Kwame Nkuruma, Chalimbana and Palabana Universities. This measure however, will only affect students who are joining UNZA and CBU this academic year.

For many years the University of Zambia and the Copperbelt University have benefited from Government Education Support scheme through the bursaries committee. The bursaries committee was established through a statutory instrument, No. 182 of the 1973 Education Act of the Laws of Zambia. The Bursaries Committee administers Bursaries, Scholarships, Student Loans and Fellowships for tertiary education in Zambia and abroad. The scheme in Zambia was introduced for the simple reasons that education should be a right and that every Zambian especially the most vulnerable must be able to access it at a subsidized cost.

With the high cost of education, bursaries provide an opportunity for many people to earn an education. Without assistance from an outside source, students may have trouble paying for the degree they need in order to enter the workforce and become a contributing member of society.

The fact that student bursaries have been turned into loans to students negates the need to abolish meal allowances as they are subject to recovery. What Government needs to do is to enhance recovery of student loans/bursaries in order to allow for scaling up of bursaries and increase the scheme beneficiaries. While JCTR agrees to the need to scale up bursaries to other public universities, we object to abolishing meal allowances which essentially is denying some students an opportunity to receive tertiary education. This move is not progressive because it promotes inequality in our society as students from poor families are not allowed to receive tertiary education which is key to addressing the malaise of inequality. The removal of meal allowances may deprive students of affording the basic necessities and may infringe on their right to a dignified life.

Provision and enhancing access to education is an investment and not a cost, this has been proved by countries like Japan and China that have educated their citizenry into prosperity. This provides enough evidence that education improves the economy as educated people are more productive and less dependent on provision of public goods.

JCTR urges the government to improve the bursary management system so that only deserving and vulnerable students are the ones to benefit from the loan scheme. As a country we should be talking about increasing meal allowances for our students to enable them meet the high cost of living. Further,

JCTR urges the Government to cut down on unnecessary spending in other areas such as foreign travel of government officials and move those resources to education instead. JCTR also decries the abrupt and unilateral manner in which the decision to abolish meal allowances was made. We therefore call for a transparent and consultative process to precede such announcements.

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection

P.O. Box 37774, 10101 Lusaka, Zambia

Tel: 260-211-290-410 Fax: 260-211-290-759

E-mail: jctr.sed@gmail.com

Website: www.jctr.org.zm

Location: 3813 Martin Mwamba Road, Olympia Park, Lusaka