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PRESS RELEASE

JCTR'S OBSERVATIONS ON PRESIDENT LUNGU'S SPEECH TO PARLIAMENT ON THE PROGRESS OF NATIONAL VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

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On Friday, 15th March, 2019, the President of Zambia, Mr. Edgar Chagwa Lungu, delivered his speech to Parliament on progress made in the application of national values and principles. This is a constitutional requirement under Article 9 (2) which demands that the republican president make an annual report to Parliament on the progress made in the application of national values and principles. As an institution interested in the promotion of values particularly the value of the dignity of the human person, the JCTR takes interest in reflecting on progress made in these issues.

The President's third speech on the application of national values and principles, is noteworthy for the successes it highlights under almost every theme from the previous year. Looking at the statistics cited in the speech, many of these successes are significant. First among these, that is worthy of note, is the President's statement on how various public servants, including the police, have developed codes of ethics encompassing the national values. This is a development from his speech of 2018 in which he stated that the police service was being re-defined its investigative and policing strategies to ensure respect for human dignity. Also worthy of note was the progress reported in the reporting of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). We noted the increase in the number of fast-track centres to provide justice for the victims of GBV as well as the significant increase in reports of cases from 21, 504 in 2017, to 22,073 in 2018. This demonstrates that victims are becoming more aware of their rights and confident enough in our justice system to report these cases. In addition to this, we noted that a considerable number of the victims were male, a good sign towards ending the stigma attached to GBV.

We were also pleased to note, the government's commitment to promoting good governance and integrity. Of particular interest was the progress made from last year on legislation regarding transparency and accountability in the use of public funds. In his 2018 address, the President stated government's commitment to the enactment of the Public Finance Bill. We noted with satisfaction, his mention of the enactment of the bill. We hope this bill will further transparency in the use and management of public funds. We also find the significant progress in the area of human dignity, equity and social justice commendable. We believe the revision of the minimum wage for domestic workers will go a long way towards closing the income gap between the rich and the poor. We also believe that the increase of access to social services as seen through funding the education of rural girls from vulnerable households, as well as the construction of boreholes and health centres will improve citizens' quality of lives considerably.

Whilst these strides in the application of values and principles are admirable, it is necessary that we ask ourselves what is the extent of this progress, what does it lack, and what more can be done? With regards to policing methods that respect human dignity and rights, there may be some inconsistencies

between principle and practice which we feel the president should have acknowledged. Cases of police brutality continue to be reported with some lives lost due to poor crowd management methods.

Regarding the president's pronouncements on GBV cases, we feel the government's strategy has focused on encouraging people to report these cases, and increased their confidence in the justice system in prosecuting these cases. This is commendable, but we feel a long term strategy should aim at reducing and perhaps even ending gender based violence. Some of the root causes of gender based violence include cultural attitudes towards the position of women in society, and limits on access to opportunities for low income and rural women. The 2013 meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women issued a statement in which it stressed the importance of addressing the root causes of GBV in order to reduce it significantly or even end it. We agree with them in this view.

In spite of the President's pronouncements regarding progress on increasing transparency in the management and use of public funds, as well as the commitment to fighting political violence, there may be a gap between the pronouncements and reality. Cases both of corruption and political violence continue to be reported with little effort from government of addressing them.

The President's address to Parliament demonstrates the government's willingness and commitment to applying the national values. There is no doubt that this is commendable. It is important however to probe into the extent of the application, so that the annual address does not merely become an exercise in rhetoric. It would be helpful if these addresses in future could include concrete details of how the government has dealt with situations that are contrary to the national values such as cases of corruption and political violence; as well as how government intends to expand on and consolidate gains made in areas such as infrastructure development. It is the duty of every citizen to hold the government to account for this. This call to live out the values we have outlined in our Constitution is for every Zambian. We applaud the efforts made by Government so far and we urge them to translate them into tangible and meaningful development for the attainment of a just Zambian society in which everyone enjoys the fullness of life.

Faith and Justice Programme

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