

May 27, 2020

## **JCTR Statement on Government's Decision to Re-open Schools**

### **For Immediate Release**

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) asks Government to go an extra mile to ensure safety of children and teachers as schools re-open for examination classes. According to Government, measures are being put in place to ensure that school environments are safe to avert any possible further spread of the Coronavirus as schools re-open for examination classes on 1<sup>st</sup> June. However, the JCTR would also want Government to seriously address the issue of safety of the children and teachers as they travel or transit between homes and schools as the majority of children and teachers use public transport. It has been observed that some of the public service vehicles still do not adhere to recommended hygienic standards and prevention measures thereby exposing the travelling children and teachers to risks.

One of the grounds on which the decision to prematurely close schools back in March was based on the fact that there is scant knowledge on how COVID-19 affect children. It was also feared that the overcrowding in schools would have made social distancing difficult. The decision to reopen schools, even for examination classes, challenges Zambians to think profoundly and question whether this is good decision at this time when coronavirus cases are on the rise in the country. The basic principle of probability tells us that the increase in the number of cases of a disease in a particular area proportionately increases the chances of catching the disease for the people living in that area.

The JCTR recognises that education is a right and no child should be denied the same. However, in order for children to enjoy this right, they need to have the right to health as well. In the wake of COVID-19, this is a very delicate balancing act. The closure of schools has led to loss in terms of learning hours and the ad-hoc attempts to provide e-learning as an alternative education have not been inclusive and have failed to deliver expected outcomes. The closure has affected examination classes and this may translate into extra costs should the children not sit for their examinations on time.

The World Health Organization warns that COVID-19 may remain with us for a long time and that we must learn to live under the new normal. We are reminded that the new normal does not mean business as usual. JCTR calls on Government, in the short-term, to put measures in place to ensure that schools do not become sources of a new wave of infections; and in the long-term, to reorient its policy so as to have long term solutions on how Zambia is going to manage

the education system without compromising on the quality of education and the safety of children and teaching staff.

**Note: Attribute the Statement to JCTR Acting Director – Father Alex Muyebe.**

Released by JCTR Media and Information Office on behalf for Acting Director. For any clarifications, contact Enock Ngoma on 0954755319 and 0977883129. E-mail [jctr.info@gmail.com](mailto:jctr.info@gmail.com).

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