

PEACE AND STABILITY CARDINAL TO MEETING BASIC NEEDS, SAYS JCTR

With only a few days before the 2011 parliamentary and presidential elections are held in Zambia, the *Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)* urges all Zambians, especially political parties, to uphold the peace and stability that the country has enjoyed since its political independence in 1964. As *JCTR* has said before, “we are the envy of our neighbours!”

Peace is paramount for meeting basic needs as in instances of unrest, the economy becomes unstable and makes the environment more challenging for the poor to have access to decent jobs and quality social services. The *JCTR* makes this statement in the wake of the violent attacks recorded during the campaign period in parts of Lusaka.

The importance of peace and stability cannot be overemphasised. *JCTR* believes that the favourable macro-economic indicators that Zambia has been enjoying are largely a result of investors being attracted to a stable economy coupled with unprecedented levels of peace. Perhaps more importantly, we must remember that Zambia is still battling with improving its social indicators, such as the prevailing high levels of poverty. “As the poor people are still struggling to make ends meet, any form of instability and acts of violence enhances this level of vulnerability as it acts as a significant barrier to household and economic development,” says Miniva Chibuye, Social Conditions Programme Manager at the *JCTR*.

The *Basic Needs Basket (BNB)*, a tool that tracks the cost of living for an average family of six in Lusaka and other towns across Zambia, acts as a proxy measure of levels of household vulnerability as it can be used to compare the average cost of living to the average household income levels in the country. As expected, levels of vulnerability in urban areas such as Lusaka is highly influenced by the cost of living.

Taking a one month period, from July to August 2011, the Lusaka *BNB* depicted an upward trend. For instance, the price of food commodities increased by an average of K7,750 from K806,100 to K813,850 at the end of July and August respectively. The upward adjustment was a result of increases in the price of Mealie Meal, Beans, Kapenta, Dry Fish, Eggs, Vegetables and Onion. “Clearly”, says the *JCTR*, “the food commodities that exhibited an upward cost adjustment are those mostly consumed by the poor who are usually disadvantaged by increases in such essential food items”. Although the average cost of a 25Kg of Mealie Meal increased marginally from K45,800 in July to K46,000 in August, *JCTR* is concerned that the cost of Mealie Meal has started exhibiting an upward trend too early. The expectation is that increases in the price of Mealie Meal should begin to be visible in the last quarter of the year.

As the *BNB* also measures the cost of non-food essentials, in August, the total *BNB* was to the tune of K2,922,950 in comparison to K2,922,800 in July. What must be noted is that the *BNB* excludes the cost of essential services such as transportation, health and education. Once these costs are added, it becomes more difficult for households to meet their basic needs.

Considering the already existing vulnerabilities, *JCTR* strongly calls for a violent free pre and post election period. One way of guaranteeing this is by having fair and transparent elections and by ensuring all political parties adhere to the electoral code of conduct as provided by the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ). For instance, the Electoral Code of Conduct prohibits any person from ‘causing violence or using any language or engaging in a course of conduct which leads or is likely to lead to violence or intimidation during election campaigns or elections’.

According to the *JCTR*, peace and stability is cardinal for ensuring continued economic growth and also lays ground for accelerated efforts towards meeting the targets laid out in the Sixth National Development Plan (SNDP) as well as meeting other international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

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