

Statement

12th March, 2023

MESSAGE FOR YOUTH DAY: A CALL TO ACCELERATE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT THROUGH IMPROVED SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL STANDARDS

On this day, we commemorate the Youth Day celebration in remembering the contribution of the nation's youths to Zambian society – following the disturbances of 1962 which resulted in the deaths of many young Zambians during the nation's turbulent journey to independence. The importance of Youth Day in Zambia cannot be overemphasised as it is a day dedicated to highlighting the significance of the youth to our great nation. We also acknowledge the importance of the youths today as the most productive age group cardinal to the development of the nation. Youths quintessentially remain an integral aspect of tomorrow's future, as matters of democracy, economic and social growth, technological advancements, and the improvement of medical science all lie in the hands of the Youth. The answers to solving the problems of poverty, unemployment, global warming and many other problems that Zambia is facing today lies with the next generation.

This year, Zambia celebrates youth day under the theme '*Transforming Minds for Accelerated Youth Development*'. With a little over a year of UPND's government being in office, this year's celebrations come at a time when the nation needs to assess the government's commitment to fulfilling the election promises made to the youths. Young people turned out in large numbers to vote for UPND on the backdrop of promises for job creation, youth economic empowerment, youth inclusion in the governance of the country, equal education opportunities and enforcement of the rule of law.

This year's theme entails that for youth development to be actualized, there is need for the government's transformation agenda to be youth centred throughout various development programmes. We see the government's commitment to this agenda through increased Community Development Funds (CDFs) allocation, which now stands at ZMW 28.3 million per constituency. The increased CDFs allocations have made possible the introduction of free education at both primary and secondary education levels, as well as increased provisions of bursaries at higher levels of education and skills development. There is additional commitment by the government to address the financing challenges faced by the youths and women through the introduction of youth and women empowerment programs under the CDF. We further see government commitment to job creation through the increased public sector recruitments as well as increased allocations to the agriculture sector.

However, regardless of these government interventions, youth unemployment rate and poverty levels remain very high in Zambia. In 2021, the youth unemployment rate was 17.4 percent. The female youths had a higher unemployment rate than male youths at 21.2 percent and 14.9 percent, respectively. The effects of youth unemployment have been evident from the overwhelming youth turnouts in the public sector recruitments. In the context of the rising cost of living and the 2023 anticipated global recession, accelerated youth development is highly cardinal. Government therefore needs to do more to provide an environment where youths can contribute to development and live improved livelihoods. Improvements in the CDF program, development of the manufacturing and

industry sector, better management of the mining sector, better implementation of the FISP program amongst others are needed to actualize youth development.

Politically, the youths have a key role in enhancing democracy. Evident from the role played by youths in the fight for independence as well as the large youth turnout during the 2021 general elections. This year's theme therefore calls for enhanced youth participation in the political sphere through the deliberate inclusion of a clause in the electoral policy framework that mandates political parties to adopt the youth in all their organisational structures, especially with regards to nominating members of parliament.

Zambia is one of the world's youngest countries by median age and continues to experience a sharp demographic shift. Additionally, Zambia has an estimated population of about 19.6 million and a growth rate of 2.9% per year (Zamstats, 2022). Furthermore, the majority of the Zambian population are the youths with more females than males at all age groups. However, social-cultural challenges remain a problem in Zambia as poverty and unemployment rates are higher among females than males.

Therefore, the 2023 Youth Day theme highlights the need for the abolishment of ubiquitous standards that exclude young girls and women. We need to transform our minds as well as policies towards those that promote equal opportunities for all. This calls for equal opportunities to: employment in both the public and private sectors, access property (land), education, empowerment and access to health amongst others. We need to put in place policies that protect both males and females from abuse and injustices such as forced teenage marriages.

The achievement of youth development depends on the effort to improve all the areas affecting the youths. Youths should therefore maximise on the use of already existing programmes which enable their growth, and at the same time, more direct-impacting investments are needed to cater for the rising and ever vibrant population youths prove to be.

Anchoring on the basis of commemorating Youth Day, JCTR recommends the following:

1. We urge young people to identify their full potential through self-awareness, skill development, education attainment, and participation in national development matters.
2. We additionally urge the youths to take advantage of the youth and women empowerment funds under CDF to engage in programs that will improve their livelihoods and the nation at large.
3. In a bid to enhance youth participation in issues of governance and politics, political parties should include clauses in their policy frameworks to mandate the adoption of youths in every layer of their organisational structures; fundamentally, the nomination of Member of Parliament (MP) positions.
4. Further, we urge the youths to refrain from self-destructive vices such as drug and alcohol abuse, theft and many others.
5. In acknowledging the little attention that is accorded to mental health in Zambia, we urge the UPND government to address this situation by the recruitment of more mental specialists given the worrying rising rate in suicide cases amongst the youths in Zambia.
6. As more youths enter their reproductive age, it is imperative that more measures, like that of sex education, are integrated into school curriculums, as well as the inception of family planning sensitisation programmes to help aid in slowing the exponential demographic growth rate.

7. There should be more Public-Private Partnership (PPP) socio-economic incentives both from the local and international markets for the creation of jobs in the many sectors of the economy, especially trade, from which both the youth and Zambia's GDP can benefit.
8. Government, through the Gender Division, must address the political context at lower levels to attend to the numerous issues that make women more disadvantaged candidates than their male counterparts.

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