

Press Statement

19th September 2019

THE PRESIDENTIAL SPEECH RECENTLY DELIVERED DID NOT INSPIRE HOPE

On Friday, 13th September, 2019, Republican President Mr. Edgar Chagwa Lungu addressed the National Assembly under the theme “Accelerating Sustainable Development for a Better Zambia in the Midst of Climate Change”. The Presidential address delivered annually in the month of September sets the tone of what to expect in the Budget Presentation by the Minister of Finance. In the address, climate change formed the cornerstone of the presentation.

A number of pertinent issues of concern were raised in the address. He highlighted that economic growth has been falling (now expected to drop to 2 percent from the projected 4 percent at end December 2019); that increased load shedding has adversely affected many sectors of our economy; that domestic arrears for instance payments due to retirees and to small scale suppliers to Government were high; and that malnutrition was a serious issue and that climate change was serious.

The President did a good job of highlighting the issues. Apart from highlighted the issues facing our nation, we expected the President to provide leadership and direction in policy implementation. For instance, the President reiterated that Government is committed to ensuring that the private sector thrives in our country’s economy and that one area of initiative Government will continue to encourage is the promotion of multi-economic facility zones.

However, an honest answer is required on how effective this initiative has been over the years. Many raw materials continue to remain untapped across the country, industrialization has remained low in most provinces and unemployment levels remain high especially among the youth at 17.6 percent. It appears that youth employment programmes have failed to yield positive results.

Further the President reiterated that Government will continue with climate resilient agriculture and water harvesting efforts. JCTR hopes that these efforts will include promoting of drought resistant crops such as millet, sorghum and cassava. The Presidential address failed to appreciate current crop marketing challenges that arise due to over reliance on Food Reserve Agency (FRA) and generally uncoordinated marketing system. Considering that over 50 percent of the Zambian population resides in rural areas and largely depend on agriculture, an improvement on the crop marketing policy to encourage participation of other players on the market in a coordinated manner would have given hope to small scale farmers.

In the education sector, the President announced that Government will continue with the home grown school feeding programme, construction of additional schools and charging of lower and affordable fees. However, there was no clear direction provided on how these programmes will be sustained in the light of limited public resources due to increasing public debt. One would expect that government will be thinking of promoting progressive initiatives such as production units in public schools to assure continuation of such programmes.

The mining sector is currently the anchor of the Zambian economy but as rightly pointed out has continued to face challenges such as reduced production and frequent shutting down or closures. A board clear policy direction on how the sector would run and be revamped was cardinal. In the area of governance, Government missed an opportunity to reduce tensions on the constitution making process. This statement from the President, “if citizens were reluctant to refine the constitution, Government will go ahead to refine it for them”, does not help the situation.

Public financial mismanagement is and has been of great concern among Zambians through vices such as corruption. There was no clear policy direction on how Government is seriously addressing the scourge apart from sentiments that Government will provide support to ACC, DEC, or that Government through the Public Sector Management Division (PSMD) is working to clean up the pay roll system and whoever will be found wanting, we will part company. Given the gravity of the problem of corruption, the President needed to outline stern measures Government is taking to rid out society of this serious vice.

In conclusion, the Presidential address does not inspire hope that the forthcoming budget presentation will address the plight of the majority of the people (the poor).

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The Presidential Speech Recently Delivered Did Not Inspire Hope

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