



JESUIT CENTRE FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

3813 Martin Mwamba Road, Olympia Park

P.O Box 37774, 10101 Lusaka, Zambia

Email: jctr@jesuits.org.zm

www.jctr.org.zm

Tel: +260 211 290410 | Fax: +260 211 290759

PRESS RELEASE

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Political Intolerance worries the JCTR

The just ended by-elections in Sesheke have shown that Zambia continues to experience political violence during elections time. This is worrying especially as we are heading towards the general elections in 2021. Incidents of political violence during the elections are an indication that we still have a long way to go before we achieve a culture of tolerance. Developing a culture of tolerance is a long term undertaking that removes the roots of intolerance and is necessary for the democratic process. A culture of tolerance entails that individuals and groups must be willing to “put up” with other individuals and groups in respect of their civil liberties. Incidents of political violence in any shape or form must be a concern to all of us because this is an indicator of just how intolerant our society is becoming. This should concern us because peace, civility and democracy ultimately depend on the exercise of tolerance. All citizens, including political leaders, have a responsibility to practise political tolerance in their words and actions.

Political leadership is a key factor in addressing political violence. It is high time political leaders in Zambia learnt to run their campaign based on issues and not on character assassination and violence as a way of intimidating one another. We are aware that members of political parties and cadres blindly follow instructions from their party leaders. It is therefore unforgivable when party leaders either make violent public pronouncements, or instruct their members to engage in violent acts. The JCTR notes with concern how party leaders are condoning violence by failing to stop or condemn violence when their party members have clearly been involved in violence. Political violence can be addressed by professionalism in the management of public assemblies by the Police. The JCTR urges the Police Service to operate with requisite professionalism and impartiality to prevent unnecessary incidents of cadres of two antagonistic political parties convening in the same space or area at the same time. The Zambia Police Service should rise up to the task of properly managing the crowds during the elections without depriving the citizens of their fundamental rights to assemble and express themselves freely as is guaranteed in the Constitution.

For the love of our nation, we must urgently address this virus of political intolerance in order to ensure that we will have peaceful and violent-free elections in 2021. To this effect, JCTR joins other stakeholders in calling for strengthening of the Electoral Processes Act to address the issue of political violence that takes place during the elections. We call on the electorate to exercise their right to reject political leadership that promotes or encourages violence either by words or actions. We also call on the Ministry of Justice to delink the national dialogue from the legal reforms in order to ensure that the reforms on the Public Order Act are concluded before the 2021 elections. It is our hope that in order to strengthen the professionalism of the Police, the Public Order Act will include provisions on the penalties that will be meted out on the erring police officers in order to ensure enforcement of the laws by the Zambia Police Service.

Rejection of political intolerance is a key principle of democracy that implies respect for the plurality of views and virtues of dialogue as a means of resolving conflict. We should ensure that election

campaigns and other political activities are conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. Let us work together to cultivate a culture of tolerance in Zambia as we aim to hold credible, peaceful, free and fair elections at all times in all corners of this country.

Faith and Justice Programme, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)

P.O. Box 37774, 10101 Lusaka, Zambia

Tel: 260-211-290-410 Fax: 260-211-290-759

E-mail: jctr.faithandjustice@gmail.com

jctr.office@gmail.com

Website: www.jctr.org.zm

Location: 3813 Martin Mwamba Road, Olympia Park, Lusaka

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)

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Statements

Electoral Legal Reforms

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