

16th May 2007

ZEC Pastoral Statement on the stalled Constitution Process

Bearing in mind that the Catholic tradition views participation in the political process as a moral obligation, we, the Catholic Bishops meeting in our Extended Board Meeting, of 8th May 2007 deliberated and noted, with great dismay, the current impasse that now surrounds the process towards a new Republican Constitution. Forty-three years after our independence, the country is in dire need of an inclusive constitution that will not only stand the test of time but also empower our people to answer the numerous challenges that we face as a nation. More than ever before, Zambia needs a constitution that will give rise to a positive political transformation of our country.

Over the years, as Catholic Bishops, we have listened to the cries of our people; we have even made written submissions to one Constitution Review Commission after another; participated in various fora discussing the constitution; urged our many capable Zambian scholars to unravel all the difficulties impeding the processes towards a new and progressive constitution. We are now convinced as follows:

Firstly, it has become abundantly clear that the people have spoken loudly and clearly through submitting to the Mung'omba CRC - and that our people have unambiguously made up their minds that they want a NEW constitution not mere amendments to the current one.

Secondly, it is now clear that for the good of this nation, the Constitution issues and those of the Electoral Act must be settled well before the 2011 Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

Thirdly, our country is losing out on development by unnecessarily prolonging the enactment of a new constitution. It is our duty as Pastors to pray for this nation that the peace the Lord God Almighty plans for us may always be realized. The people of Zambia have spoken; they want a new Constitution before the 2011 Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

We therefore remind the Government once again that the people of Zambia have heard all the arguments and they have made up their minds that they do not want a constitution that no longer serves their aspirations.

The role of Government is to facilitate for the enactment of a new one. We further implore Government to desist from excessive legalism. Our country can no longer afford the luxury of procrastination, which has characterized the Government's approach to the current Constitution Review Process.

In conclusion, we say to the Government: The people are tired of the slow pace at which the Constitution Review Process is being conducted. Now is the time to positively engage all sectors of the Zambian society in this serious matter; to make concessions and adopt a more progressive road map towards the enactment of a new constitution. We are aware that many countries in Africa have learnt to look up to Zambia, after we peacefully passed from a one-party state to multi-party politics. We have an obligation to show the other countries how to peacefully pass from an out-dated Constitution to a people-driven one.

We as the Catholic Bishops, together with the Church and the nation at large, are ready to give full support to this approach because anything short of this approach will only lead to more tension and increased polarisation and confrontation in our land. Our people deserve better.

May the Almighty God bless our Beloved nation Zambia.

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