

## **A Pastoral Statement from the Zambia Episcopal Conference on Presidential Elections -30 October 2008.**

***“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.” [Mark 3:24]***

To all our Catholic faithful and all the people of God in Zambia. Greetings! We the Catholic Bishops gathered here in Lusaka for our Extended Board Meeting, from 3<sup>rd</sup> November to 7<sup>th</sup> November 2008, would like to entrust this great nation of Zambia to Our Lord Jesus. Our Lord Jesus tells us in Scripture that, a Kingdom that is divided against itself cannot stand. The just ended Presidential Election has left this country more divided than ever before. How can we be a nation if we are not united?

### **1. Introduction**

For a long time now, the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC) has addressed this nation on election matters. It makes us very sad, that by and large we have not made much progress, as a nation, on these issues. When we look back at our Pastoral Letters and Statements, our concerns over the years are still as valid today as they were in 1996, 2001, 2006 and today. As Catholic Bishops in Zambia, we will never stop speaking for our flock and asking difficult questions of ourselves or of those who govern us, for Our Lord Jesus tells us: The Truth shall set you free. [John 8:32]

### **2. We are non-partisan**

We waited until the election was over to make this Statement to avoid being misunderstood. Catholic Bishops are firmly committed to a non-partisan role in the politics of this nation. We have no desire whatsoever for political office or to influence people to vote in a particular manner. This Statement is a result of our concern with regard to what is happening to our electoral process, in Zambia.

### 3. A divided nation

We have closely observed that the pattern of voting during the past few elections have been along very partisan, regional and tribal lines. We now appear more divided and polarized, as a nation, than we were before multi-partyism was re-introduced in 1991. This state of affairs is worrying and should not be allowed to continue. In the October 2008 elections, we recognise that many observers, both those that are partisan and non-partisan, noted significant weaknesses in vote patterns, counting and reporting. Something needs to be done to improve this state of affairs.

### 4. Voter Apathy

Voting is not only a right but it is a civic responsibility to one's country. The slogan, "Your vote is your power" may sound like a cliché but it is a truth that cannot be overemphasized in a democratic country. The low numbers of people who voted on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2008 is cause for serious concern. It does not augur well for our young democracy to have only 1.8 million people voting out of 3.9 million registered voters, resulting in a low voter turn-out of 45.43 per cent. It will be recalled that in 2006, the voter turn-out was 70.70 per cent. Clearly there is urgent need for voter education.

Voter education is a responsibility of Government first and foremost. However, it would appear that voter education has now become a responsibility of NGOs and Churches alone. Political parties also need to embrace voter education as an integral part of their party activities even as these activities culminate into election campaigns. If need be, political parties should, between now and the next elections (2011), mount concerted efforts to educate their members on the importance of casting their ballots.

Voter apathy is partly the result of thinking that "my vote does not count". It is also partly as a result of the public perception of alleged irregularities in the conduct of elections.

Our message to all Zambians is: Never get tired of voting, as your apathy will only deny you the choice of **your** preferred candidate.

## **5. Voter Registration**

An election is meaningless or loses value if only very few people participate in voting. This underscores the importance of having a good voter registration system that aims at capturing the maximum possible number of eligible voters. The power of citizens in relationship to their elected representatives lies in actively participating in elections. We regret the fact that progressive legislation passed in 2001, under Statutory Instrument Number 51, providing for continuous voter registration, has never been implemented. The advantage of continuous voter registration is that: Young people who reach voting age are free to register without the pressure of registration deadlines; those who for one reason or another have not yet registered would be brought on board again without the pressure of registration deadlines. These are issues that we have discussed before. You will recall the many debates around the infamous NIKUV Voter Register. More than ten years later, we are still discussing and debating the very same issues!

Similarly, it will be noted that voters' cards that are acquired do get lost. It is a fact of life. There must be a mechanism that replaces lost voters' cards continuously and in exceptional cases, those with National Registration Cards should be allowed to vote in the places where they registered. Remember, every vote counts.

## **6. Electoral Malpractices**

The recent election campaigns demonstrated that the issue of bribery and other forms of corrupt practices are still being used to induce votes. The media was alert in this regard and exposed these electoral malpractices. We are extremely worried that these vices are now increasingly being seen as normal during election campaigns. On the other hand, we wonder if the Electoral Code of Conduct has any sting! Why is it that politicians and other stakeholders, agree on procedures and on the Electoral Code of Conduct that they are only too eager to circumvent?

## 7. WAY FORWARD AND CHALLENGES

The credibility of elections in Zambia needs to be enhanced so that the security of our unitary state is not, in any way, threatened.

- I. **Urgent Electoral Reform:** Certainly, one thing is very clear from the 30 October 2008 election process. There must be immediate and far-reaching electoral reform that will once again inspire confidence in the electoral process. The era of minority Presidential victories should be avoided forthwith because it weakens the mandate of the President. We look forward to a future when a presidential candidate will command a clear 50% plus one votes.
- II. **Reform of the Electoral Commission of Zambia:** We recall that Zambia undertook an expensive programme through the Electoral Reform Technical Committee (ERTC) and the Mung'omba Constitution Commission in order to improve the electoral process and system, the operations of the Electoral Commission of Zambia, and the conduct of the elections. We would like to see that the recommendations of the ERTC are given due attention, enhanced and implemented in readiness for any future elections.

Since the flouting of electoral procedures and the Electoral Code of Conduct seem to go on with impunity, it is time the perpetrators were brought to book and punished to serve as a deterrent to other potential offenders.

- III. **A New Constitution Soon:** As soon as practically possible, the Government must ensure that a new Constitution is in place by the end of 2009, at the latest. The Government should not drag anymore the constitution-making process. In this regard, it is also important that lessons and constitutional gaps identified with the emergency of our late President, Dr Levy Mwanawasa's sickness and eventual passing on be taken into account in the new Constitution.
- IV. **Continuous Voter Registration:** The Minister of Finance needs to provide in the 2009 National Budget, and beyond 2009, enough funds to facilitate continuous voter registration by the Electoral Commission of Zambia. This will enable all eligible voters to register continuously. In so doing, the country will be

able to capture as many eligible voters out of the 12 million people in Zambia as possible.

- V. **Availability of the Bishops for Reconciliation:** In one way or another, the various political parties need each other. As Zambians, we may disagree on many things but we must never give in to hate, whether on the basis of political affiliation or along tribal lines.

In this regard, we as the Catholic Bishops of Zambia, resolved during our just ended meeting, to be available, if needed, to facilitate reconciliation between leaders of political parties. However, we would urge various political leaders to come to the discussion table with open minds and sincere hearts.

## **8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, we would like to congratulate all Zambians for the peaceful and calm manner in which they conducted themselves before, during and after the 30 October 2008 elections. Zambians have always been known to be peace-loving people and clearly demonstrated this. We urge you all to continue being calm and peaceful. We take this opportunity to remind all Zambians that the rule of law should always take precedence to guarantee peace in the nation. The police and the army are not there to imprison us. They are our brothers and sisters who defend us all.

Lastly, let us strive to be a nation of prayerful people and to continue to pray for our nation. May God the Almighty continue to bless this nation.

Presented on **9<sup>th</sup> November 2008** and signed below by the following:

Right Rev. George Zumaile Lungu  
**Bishop of Chipata Diocese and President of the  
ZEC**

Right Rev. Noel O'Regan, SMA  
**Bishop of Ndola Diocese and ZEC Vice President**

Right Raymond Mpezele  
**Bishop of Livingstone Diocese.**

Right Rev Aaron Andrew Chisha  
**Bishop of Mansa Diocese**

Rt. Rev. Paul Duffy, OMI  
**Bishop of Mongu Diocese.**

Right Rev. Emilio Patriarca  
**Bishop of Monze Diocese.**

Right Rev. Alick Banda  
**Bishop of Solwezi Diocese.**

Right Rev. Ignatius Chama  
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Most Rev. Telesphore-George Mpundu  
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Most Rev. Merdardo Mazombwe  
**Archbishop Emeritus of Lusaka Archdiocese**

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