

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. LEVY P. MWANAWASA, SC,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA**

AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE

ASSOCIATION OF MEMBER EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES IN EASTERN AFRICA

(AMECEA) PLENARY ASSEMBLY

MULUNGUSHI INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

28TH JUNE, 2008

- **YOUR EMINENCE, CARDINAL DIAS, PRESIDENT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH AT THE VATICAN;**
- **YOUR GRACE ARCHBISHOP PAUL BAKYENGA, CHAIRMAN OF AMECEA;**
- **THE AMECEA SECRETARY GENERAL, VERY REVEREND FR. PIUS RUTECHURA;**
- **THE PRESIDENT OF THE ZAMBIA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, YOUR LORDSHIP, BISHOP GEORGE LUNGU;**
- **YOUR EMINENCES, THE CARDINALS;**
- **YOUR GRACES, THE ARCHBISHOPS ;**
- **YOUR LORDSHIPS, THE BISHOPS;**
- **YOUR EXCELLENCY, THE APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO ZAMBIA AND MALAWI, ARCHBISHOP NICOLA GIRASOLI;**
- **VERY REVEREND SECRETARY GENERALS OF VARIOUS EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES;**
- **REPRESENTATIVES OF VARIOU PARTNERS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH;**

- **REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER CHURCHES IN ZAMBIA;**
- **AMECEA OFFICIALS AND SECRETARIAT STAFF;**
- **STAFF OF THE ZAMBIA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE;**
- **HON. MISTERS AND DEPUTY MINISTERS PRESENT;**
- **MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF MMD;**
- **LEADERS OF VARIOUS OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES IN ZAMBIA;**
- **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS;**
- **FELLOW CHRISTIANS**

I GREET YOU ALL IN THE NAME OF THE PRINCE OF PEACE AND THE CITADEL OF JUSTICE, OUR SAVIOUR THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. I AM GREATLY HUMBLLED TO WELCOME ALL OF YOU, PARTICULARLY OUR VISITORS TO ZAMBIA, THE LAND WE PROUDLY CALL **“THE REAL AFRICA”**, THE SEAT OF AFRICAN LIBERATION AND PEACE. ZAMBIA IS SO-NAMED BECAUSE OF OUR INTERNATIONALLY UNRIVALLED HOSPITALITY AND TRADITION OF PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AMID CULTURAL AND POLITICAL DIVERSITY. YES, WE ARE PROUD OF ONE OF OUR GREATEST ASSETS, THE FRIENDLINESS AND WARMTH OF OUR PEOPLE, EVEN IN THE FACE OF THE CURRENT COLD WEATHER. I AM SURE YOU WILL ALL TAKE TIME TO PROVE ME RIGHT DURING THE COURSE OF YOUR DELIBERATIONS HERE IN LUSAKA, IF YOU HAVE NOT YET DONE SO.

ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT, THE PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA, AND INDEED ON MY OWN BEHALF, I SAY TO YOU, DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, **“KARIBUNI SANA”**.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, YOUR EMMINENCES, DISTINGUISHED AMECEA BISHOPS, IT IS ONLY RIGHT AND FITTING THAT YOU SHOULD CONVERGE IN ZAMBIA UNDER THE THEME **“RECONCILIATION THROUGH JUSTICE AND PEACE”**. INDEED, I AM BRIEFED THAT ZAMBIA WAS CHOSEN TO HOST THIS PARTICULAR ASSEMBLY ON THIS THEME FOR TWO MAIN REASONS.

FIRSTLY, IT IS BECAUSE THE ZAMBIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS A VERY VIBRANT JUSTICE AND PEACE MINISTRY. AS PRESIDENT OF ZAMBIA TODAY, I CAN CONFIDENTLY CONFIRM THAT BECAUSE I HAVE ON SEVERAL OCCASSIONS FELT THE VIBRANCY OF THIS MINISTRY. WHETHER OR NOT IT HAS ALWAYS MADE ME CONFORTABLE IS ANOTHER MATTER!!!

SECONDLY, IT IS BECAUSE ZAMBIA HAS BEEN RECOGNISED AS A PEACEFUL COUNTRY THAT HAS WITHSTOOD THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY, HOLDING ITSELF TOGETHER SINCE INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT ANY CIVIL STRIFE.

THIS IS, OF COURSE, COMMENDABLE IN COMPARISON TO WHAT WE HAVE SEEN IN MANY OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD. FOR THIS GREAT GIFT OF PEACE, WE ARE ETERNALLY THANKFUL TO GOD OUR FATHER. IT IS ALWAYS OUR PRAYER THAT OUR NATION WILL ALWAYS REMAIN UNITED EVEN IN THE FACE OF SERIOUS CHALLENGES OF POVERTY AS A RESULT OF UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT, ESPECIALLY BETWEEN OUR RURAL AND URBAN AREAS. YOUR DECISION TO HOLD THIS IMPORTANT ASSEMBLY IN OUR COUNTRY WILL KEEP US ENCOURAGED TO STAY THE COURSE OF PEACE AND TO DO EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER, WITH GOD'S HELP, TO EXPORT THIS RARE HUMANE COMMODITY TO THE REST OF AFRICA AND THE ENTIRE WORLD. I BEG ALL OF YOU TO KEEP US IN YOUR PRAYERS AS WE ASPIRE TO BE THE "**LIGHT AND SALT**" OF THE EARTH AS OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST COMMANDED US TO BE.

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, ZAMBIA'S PEACEFUL DISPOSITION DID NOT COME BY ACCIDENT. FOR MANY YEARS, IT HAS BEEN ANCHORED ON OUR HISTORICAL READINESS FOR DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION WHENEVER WE HAVE BEEN FACED WITH A SITUATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT. THOSE THAT HAVE TAKEN THE TROUBLE TO READ ZAMBIA'S POLITICAL HISTORY WILL RECALL THAT THE FIRST ZAMBIAN COALITION GOVERNMENT OF 1962 WAS BORN OUT OF RECONCILIATION BETWEEN DR. KENNETH KAUNDA AND MR HARRY MWAANGA NKUMBULA. AS YOU WILL RECALL, THE TWO LEADERS HAD EARLIER BEEN SERIOUS POLITICAL RIVALS. BY FORMING THE COALITION BETWEEN THEIR POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION, THEY EFFECTIVELY DEFEATED THE EUROPEAN-DOMINATED **UNITED FEDERAL PARTY (UFP)**, DEFINING THE PATH TO OUR POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE IN 1964. IN THE SAME NATIONALIST SPIRIT, **THE CHOMA DECLARATION** OF 27TH JUNE, 1973 WAS PROCLAIMED BY THE SAME TWO HEROIC LEADERS OF OUR HISTORY TO CURB THE THEN RISING POLITICAL STRIFE IN OUR COUNTRY.

LET ME REMIND OUR FELLOW CITIZENS THAT WE ARE GREATLY BLESSED TO HAVE THIS PLENARY IN ZAMBIA TODAY WHEN WE ARE CELEBRATING TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OR THE SIVER JUBILEE OF THE CHOMA DECLARATION WHICH FELL ONLY YESTERDAY.

MORE RECENTLY, IN 1990, WE ONCE AGAIN SAW THE ZAMBIAN RECONCILIATORY SPIRIT WHEN DR. KENNETH KAUNDA, IN THE FACE OF THE RISING DEMAND FOR MULTI-PARTYISM, CALLED FOR MULTI-PARTY ELECTIONS IN 1991, THUS CURTAILING HIS OWN PRESIDENTIAL TERM BY TWO YEARS. HE WENT FURTHER TO PEACEFULLY HAND OVER POWER TO DR. FRIEDRICK CHILUBA AND THE MMD FOLLOWING HIS ELECTORAL DEFEAT IN THOSE EPOCH-MAKING ELECTIONS THAT OPENED DOORS TO THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT.

ALLOW ME TO SAY TODAY, WHAT A BLESSED NATION WE ARE FOR HAVING HAD A SELFLESS LEADERSHIP FROM THE BEGINNING OF OUR NATIONHOOD. THUS, THE ONLY WAY THAT I COULD APPRECIATE THE GREAT CONTRIBUTION OF DR. KENNETH KAUNDA TO THE PEACE OF OUR COUNTRY WAS TO CONFER UPON THIS GREAT SON OF AFRICA THE HONOUR **TO BE GRAND OFFICER OF THE EAGLE OF ZAMBIA, FIRST DIVISION**, THE HIGHEST HONOUR THAT A ZAMBIAN HEAD OF STATE CAN CONFER.

THIS WAS IN NO WAY MEANT TO RECOMPENSE HIM FOR ALL HIS HEROIC WORKS IN THE HISTORY OF OUR NATION. NO. FAR FROM IT. THERE COULD BE NO PRICE GOOD ENOUGH TO COVER THE PERSONAL SACRIFICES THAT WENT WITH THE STRUGGLE FOR OUR FREEDOM AND THE FREEDOM OF OUR NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES IN THIS REGION. IT WAS SIMPLY TO SAY **“THANK YOU, FATHER OF OUR NATION, FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE FOR US AND FOR OUR CONTINENT.”**

FELLOW CHRISTIANS, WHAT THEN IS RECONCILIATION? THE COLLIER'S DICTIONARY DEFINES THE WORD "RECONCILE" AS **" TO MAKE FRIENDLY AGAIN OR WIN OVER A FRIENDLY ATTITUDE; TO SETTLE A QUARREL OR DISPUTE; TO MAKE ARGUMENTS, IDEAS, TEXTS, ACCOUNTS, ETC, CONSISTENT, COMPATIBLE, ETC; TO BRING INTO HARMONY".**

IN THE **"CATHECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH"** BY PAULINES PUBLICATION AFRICA, 1994, WE ARE TAUGHT THAT RECONCILIATION DENOTES FORGIVENESS, MAN'S ACCEPTANCE OF HIS SINFUL NATURE AND GOD'S READINESS TO FORGIVE. THROUGH THE **SACRAMENT OF PENANCE**, THE SINNER CONFESSES HIS OR HER SINS BY DISCLOSING THEM TO GOD, THUS ACKNOWLEDGING AND PRAISING THE HOLINESS OF GOD AND HIS MERCY TOWARDS SINFUL MAN. THROUGH THE PRIEST'S SACRAMENTAL ABSOLUTION, GOD GRANTS PARDON AND PEACE TO THE PENITENT OR THE ONE WHO CONFESSES THEIR SINS.

FROM THIS TEACHING THEREFORE, IT IS CLEAR THAT RECONCILIATION CANNOT HAPPEN IN THE ABSENCE OF CONFESSION WHICH CAN ONLY OCCUR UPON REGOGNITION OF AND REGRET FOR ONE'S WRONG-DOING. AND IN THE ABSENCE OF RECONCILIATION, THERE CAN BE NO PEACE AND NO FORGIVENESS FROM GOD!! IN THE HOLY BIBLE, IN MATTEW CHAPTER 5 VERSES 22 TO 24, IT IS WRITTEN:

" I SAY TO YOU, WHOEVER IS ANGRY WITH HIS BOTHER (OR INDEED, SISTER) WILL BE LIABLE TO JUDGEMENT...THEREFORE, IF YOU BRING YOUR GIFT TO THE ALTER, AND THERE YOU RECALL THAT YOUR BROTHER HAS ANYTHING AGAINST YOU, LEAVE YOUR GIFT THERE AT THE ALTER, GO FIRST AND BE RECONCILED WITH YOUR BOTHER, AND THEN COME AND OFFER YOUR GIFT."

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THIS TEACHING TELLS US THAT WITHOUT RECONCILIATION AMONGST OURSELVES; OUR PRAYERS TO GOD WILL NOT BE ANSWERED. WE MUST THEREFORE DO FIRST THINGS FIRST: RECONCILE THEN SEEK THE FACE OF GOD.

WHEN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST TAUGHT US HOW TO PRAY, HE INSTRUCTED US TO SAY: **“FORGIVE US OUR TRESSPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESSPASS AGAINST US”** (LUKE CHAPTER 11 VERSE 4 AND MATTEW CHAPTER 6 VERSE 12). THIS IS RECONCILIATION, A GIVE-AND-TAKE PROCESS. IT IS FOUNDED ON LOVE WHICH, ACCORDING TO ROMANS CHAPTER 13 VERSE 10, **“DOES NO EVIL TO THE NEIGHBOUR.”**

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. FROM ZAMBIA’S POLITICAL BACKGROUND THAT I HAVE JUST RECOUNTED, IT SHOULD NOT SURPRISE ANY OF US WHEN WE LOOK AT THE RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN OUR COUNTRY. I AM REFERING HERE TO THE NOW INFAMOUS RECONCILIATION BETWEEN MYSELF AND THE PATRIOTIC FRONT LEADER, MR. MICHAEL SATA. THIS IS NOT A STRANGE PHENOMENON. IT IS THE NORMAL WAY THAT WE ZAMBIANS HAVE HISTORICALLY DEALT WITH CONFLICT. FOR THE PURPOSE OF OUR VISITORS, BEMBA’S AND NGONI’S FOUGHT BITTER TRIBAL WARS. I DON’T WANT TO JUDGE AS TO WHO THE WINNER WAS, BUT I WILL LEAVE THAT TO ARCHBISHOP MPUNDU AND BISHOP LUNGU TO RESOLVE. ONE THING I WILL GUARANTEE YOU, HOWEVER, IS THAT THE TWO CHURCH LEADERS WILL NOT AGREE AS TO WHAT THE RESULT OF THE WAR WAS, BUT IRONICALLY, THEY WILL EMBRACE EACH OTHER AFTER A LONG ARGUMENT. WHEN A RELATIVE OF ONE OF THEM DIES, THE OTHER ONE, WITH ALL HIS RELATIVES, WILL TAKE OVER THE FUNERAL PROCEEDINGS THAT WILL EFFECTIVELY LIGHTEN THE BURDEN OF THE OTHER.

WHAT I AM SAYING, DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IS THAT OUT OF THAT BITTER TRIBAL WAR WAS BORN ONE OF THE BEST INTER-TRIBAL RELATIONSHIPS IN OUR COUNTRY. FROM MY BITTER QUARRELS WITH MR. SATA, A TIME HAD TO COME WHEN IT HAD TO STOP IN THE INTEREST OF PEACE IN OUR COUNTRY. AS IT WERE, THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS HAD TO BE STIMULATED BY A LIFE-THREATENING SITUATION. WHETHER GOOD OR BAD IS NOT FOR ME TO JUDGE BUT I BELIEVE GOD HAS A PLAN FOR EVERYTHING.

MANY OF YOU WILL RECALL THAT IN MY INAUGURAL SPEECH FOR MY SECOND PRESIDENTIAL TERM AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON 3RD OCTOBER, 2006, I EMPHATICALLY STATED:

“... THIS IS MY FINAL PRESIDENTIAL TERM. I HAVE A DREAM TO LEAVE ZAMBIA EVEN GREATER THAN BEFORE YOU ELECTED ME IN 2001. HOWEVER, I WILL ONLY DO SO WITH YOUR SUPPORT AND COMMITMENT. I WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE A LEGACY OF THE RULE OF LAW. I WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE A CULTURE WHERE NATIONAL DEBATE IS NOT ABOUT ASSASSINATING EACH OTHER’S CHARACTERS BUT A SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS THAT AFFECT THE WEAKEST MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY...

[HOWEVER] OUR EFFORTS WILL NOT YIELD MUCH IF THEY ARE NOT FOUNDED ON STRONG FEELINGS OF LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER AND A STRONG COMMITMENT TO NATIONAL UNITY...LET US ALL UNITE TO CREATE A BETTER ZAMBIA...WE NEED EACH OTHER TO SUCCEED.”

HENCE, MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IF YOU HAD READ THE LETTER AND SPIRIT OF MY SPEECH ON THAT GREAT DAY, THIS DEVELOPMENT SHOULD NOT SURPRISE OR UNSETTLE YOU. FELLOW CHRISTIANS, I DO NOT SAY THIS TO SEEK PRAISE AND REWARD. NAY. THE PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA HAVE REWARDED ME ENOUGH BY MAKING ME THEIR TOP SERVANT, AN HONOUR FOR WHICH I WILL ALWAYS REMAIN TRULY GRATEFUL. NEITHER DO I WISH TO CLAIM TOTAL INNOCENCE IN SOME OF THE POLITICAL DIFFERENCES THAT WE MAY HAVE EXPERIENCED DURING MY PRESIDENCY. HUMAN AS I AM, I HAVE PROBABLY CONTRIBUTED AS MUCH TO THESE DIFFERENCES AS MY COLLEAGUES IN THE OPPOSITION BUT THIS HAS NOT IN ANY WAY SUBTRACTED FROM MY INNERMOST DESIRE FOR POLITICAL TOLERANCE AND TRANQUILITY. TO CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND SENIOR CLERGY, THIS MAY SOUND LIKE A CONFESSION THOUGH IT MAY FALL SHORT OF THE STRICT CRITERIA OF A CATHOLIC PENITENTIAL RITE.****

ALLOW ME, NEVERTHELESS, TO SAY MY ABSOLUTION IN THE WORDS OF ONE OLD PHILOSOPHER, JOHN MILTON, WHO SAID, **“WHAT IN ME IS DARK, ILLUMINATE; WHAT IN ME IS LOW, RAISE AND SUPPORT.”******

LET ME TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK MY BROTHER, MICHAEL SATA FOR HAVING DEMONSTRATED HUMILITY AND MAGNANIMITY AS WE LEAD THE PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA TO GREATER PROSPERITY WITHIN OUR PLURAL POLITICAL DISPENSATION. THIS MEANS THAT ALL POLITICAL PARTIES IN ZAMBIA, INCLUDING THE MMD AND THE PATRIOTIC FRONT, WILL, AT LEAST IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, REMAIN INDEPENDENT OF EACH OTHER AND COMPETE FOR THE PEOPLE'S VOTE IN ALL ELECTIONS. OUR INDEPENDENCE WILL GUARANTEE ACCOUNTABILITY IN PUBLIC OFFICE THROUGH CHECKS AND BALANCES, THE CRITICAL ROLE THAT IS TRADITIONALLY PLAYED BY OPPOSITION PARTIES IN MULTI-PARTY POLITICAL SYSTEMS LIKE OURS. OF THE CITIZENS OF THIS COUNTRY, THEREFORE, I ONLY ASK YOUR PATIENCE TO ALLOW THIS PROCESS TO WORK. FROM THE CHURCH, BOTH CATHOLIC AND OTHER DENOMINATIONS, I ASK NOT FOR YOUR CONDEMNATION BUT FOR YOUR UNDERSTANDING AND PRAYERS FOR THE HEALING THAT THIS NATION SO DESPERATELY NEEDS TO MAINTAIN OUR PEACEFUL WAYS.

THE CHALLENGES THAT THE THEME OF THIS PLENARY POSE TO AFRICA AND THE WORLD AT LARGE ARE ENORMOUS, TO SAY THE LEAST. TODAY, WE LIVE IN A WORLD TORN APART BY CONFLICT; A WORLD DOMINATED BY HATRED, WAR AND CIVIL STRIFE. THIS CHALLENGES THE CHRISTIAN WORLD TO BE THE **LIGHT AND SALT** OF THE EARTH.

TODAY, WE HAVE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSLATE THE TEACHINGS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE PRINCE OF PEACE, INTO PRACTICAL REALITIES. WE CAN EITHER GRASP THIS OPPORTUNITY OR SQUANDER IT AND FACE JUDGEMENT WHEN THAT DAY COMES.

TO PROMOTE LOVE, WE MUST EMBRACE RECONCILIATION WHICH, UNFORTUNATELY, IS A HARD AND PAINFUL PROCESS BUT WITH NO ESCAPE ROUTES OR SHORTCUTS. IT CALLS US TO ENGAGE OUR ADVERSARIES IN CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE WHOSE ONLY OUTCOME IS PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROGRESS. THE EARLIER THAT WE AFRICAN POLITICAL LEADERS RECOGNISE THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION, THE BETTER FOR OUR PEOPLES. UNNECESSARY CONFLICT WILL ONLY RETARD OUR CONTINENT AND DRIVE OUR NATIONS INTO FURTHER POVERTY AND SQUALOR.

FELLOW CHRISTIANS, IS IT NOT A SERIOUS CONTRADICTION AND UTTER HYPOCRICY THAT ALTHOUGH CHRISTIANITY IS GROWING IN AFRICA, WE AFRICANS CONTINUE TO HATE EACH OTHER WITH PASSION? HOW CAN ONE EXPLAIN THE RECENT XENOPHOBIC, NOW BEING REFFERED TO AFRI-PHOBIC, ATTACKS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA? I DO NOT WANT TO BELIEVE THAT THIS IS THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAY OF EXPRESSING GRATITUDE TO OTHER AFRICAN NATIONS THAT SACRIFICED SO MUCH IN THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE. GOD FORBID! THERE IS CLEARLY SOMETHING AMISS WHICH CALLS FOR URGENT AND SERIOUS RESOLUTION.

YOUR GRACES, YOUR LORDSHIPS, FELLOW CHRISTIANS, AFRICA TODAY FACES AN UPHILL BATTLE IN ENSURING JUSTICE IN OUR GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS, AND ZAMBIA IS NO EXCEPTION. WE CANNOT CLAIM TO ENTRENCH JUSTICE IN OUR GOVERNANCE PROCESSES IN THE FACE OF HIGH POVERTY LEVELS ESPECIALLY IN OUR RURAL AREAS. ACCORDING TO THE LIVING CONDITIONS SURVEY OF 2006, POVERY LEVELS IN ZAMBIA STAND AT 64 PERCENT. IN RURAL AREAS, POVERTY STANDS AT A STAGGERING 80 PERCENT.

ALTHOUGH WE HAVE WORKED HARD TO REDUCE THE LEVELS FROM 73 PERCENT IN 1998 TO THE CURRENT LEVELS, I HAVE ALWAYS ADMITTED THAT THIS SITUATION IS CLEARLY UNSATISFACTORY.

IN MY ADDRESS AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE **NATIONAL INDABA** ON 17TH OCTOBER, 2003, I REGRETTED THE HIGH INCIDENCE OF POVERTY IN OUR COUNTRY DESPITE OUR RICH NATURAL RESOUCE ENDOWMENT. I OBSERVED THAT THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY WAS NOT A PRESERVE OF GOVERNMENT ALONE. I THEREFORE CALLED ON ALL OUR PEOPLE -POLITICAL PARTIES, CIVIL SOCIETY, THE CHURCH, THE LABOUR MOVEMENT, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND THE ENTIRE CITIZENRY TO UNITE IN ENSURING THAT WE DEFEAT POVERTY AND BRING BACK DIGNITY TO ALL OUR PEOPLE.

I AM PLEASED TO NOTE THAT WE ARE NOW WORKING IN TANDEM BUT A LOT STILL REMAINS TO BE DONE IF WE ARE TO GUARANTEE SUSTAINED PEACE AND JUSTICE IN OUR LAND. I BELIEVE THAT THE CHURCH AND STATE SHARE A COMMON, UNIQUE AND HISTORICAL CALLING - THAT OF STRIVING TO CONSTANTLY LIFT OUR PEOPLE FROM HUNGER, ILLITERACY AND DISEASE.

TODAY, WE ARE CONFRONTED BY THE **HIV/AIDS** PANDEMIC WHICH THREATENS OUR VERY OWN EXISTENCE AS HUMANITY, HENCE RAISING THE STAKES FOR GREATER CO-OPERATION BETWEEN US. DESPITE THE FACT THAT WE MAY SOMETIMES DISAGREE AS CHURCH AND STATE, WE ARE INEXTRICABLY INTERTWINED AND WE OWE IT TO OUR PEOPLE TO STRENGTHEN OUR PARTNERSHIP IN THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY.

ALTHOUGH THE CHALLENGE OF POVERTY STILL REMAINS IN OUR MIDST, I AM CONSOLLED TO NOTE THAT THE SITUATION IN AFRICA AND IN PARTICULAR, THE **AMECEA** REGION, IS SLOWLY IMPROVING. IT WILL OBVIOUSLY TAKE SOME TIME FOR THE CURRENT POSITIVE ECONOMIC INDICATORS TO TRANSLATE INTO THE DESIRED RESULTS FOR OUR PEOPLE TO DIRECTLY EXPERIENCE AT BOTH PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD LEVELS. I AM OPTIMISTIC, HOWEVER, THAT, WITH GOD'S HELP AND PATIENCE ON THE PART OF OUR PEOPLE, WE SHALL CERTAINLY GET THERE.

ALLOW ME TO ACKNOWLEDGE, AT THIS POINT, THE TREMENDOUS WORK THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS DONE AND CONTINUES TO DO IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AREAS OF OUR COUNTRY. HERE, I HAVE IN MIND YOUR GREAT CONTRIBUTION IN THE EDUCATION AND HEALTH SECTORS SINCE THE DAWN OF CHRISTIANITY IN OUR COUNTRY. I ALSO GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR OUTSTANDING ADVOCACY FOR DEBT CANCELLATION THROUGH THE **JUBILEE 2000 CAMPAIGN**.

TODAY, OUR COUNTRY IS RECORDING POSITIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH RATES, PARTLY AS A RESULT OF THE DEBT CANCELLATION THAT WE RECEIVED WITH YOUR FULL SUPPORT. I URGE YOU TO USE YOUR POWER THIS TIME AROUND TO WAGE ANOTHER CAMPAIGN FOR FAIRER TERMS OF TRADE AND INCREASED INVESTMENT IN OUR ECONOMIES BY THE RICH NATIONS.

THIS IS ONE SURE WAY IN WHICH WE CAN COLLECTIVELY FIGHT POVERTY THROUGH JOB AND WEALTH CREATION. IN THIS WAY, WE SHALL ENTRENCH JUSTICE AND PEACE WHICH CAN ONLY BE GUARANTEED WHEN ALL OUR PEOPLE IN BOTH RURAL AND URBAN AREAS ENJOY A REASONABLE STANDARD OF LIVING. AS **POPE PAUL THE SIXTH** STATED IN HIS ENCYCLICAL LETTER, **POPULORUM PROGRESSIO**, "**DEVELOPMENT IS THE NEW NAME FOR PEACE**".

IN HIS NEW YEAR ADDRESS TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE VATICAN ON 7TH JANUARY, 2008: THE HOLY FATHER, POPE BENEDICT THE SIXTEENTH, SAID:

“PEACE CANNOT BE A MERE WORD OR A VAIN ASPIRATION. PEACE IS A COMMITMENT AND A MANNER OF LIFE WHICH DEMANDS THAT LEGITIMATE ASPIRATIONS OF ALL SHOULD BE SATISFIED, SUCH AS ACCESS TO FOOD, WATER AND ENERGY, TO MEDICINE AND TECHNOLOGY, OR INDEED THE MONITORING OF CLIMATE CHANGE. ONLY IN THIS WAY CAN WE BUILD THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY; ONLY IN THIS WAY CAN WE FACILITATE AN INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT VALID FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW... HENCE, IN ORDER TO CONSOLIDATE PEACE, THE POSITIVE MACROECONOMIC RESULTS ACHIEVED BY MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES DURING 2007 MUST BE SUPPORTED BY EFFECTIVE SOCIAL POLICIES AND BY THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AID COMMITMENTS BY RICH NATIONS”.

IN CONCLUDING MY REMARKS, LET ME APPEAL TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND INDEED OTHER CHURCHES, TO PRIORITISE THE ATTAINMENT OF THE MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN YOUR EVANGELISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL TEACHINGS. LET US WORK TOGETHER, CHURCH AND STATE, TOWARDS THE ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION OF ALL OUR PEOPLE THROUGH VARIOUS EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES. I AM AWARE, YOUR GRACES, MY LORD BISHOPS, THAT WE ALL YEARN FOR THE INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT OF MANKIND, MADE SPECIALLY OF BODY AND SOUL. OUR COLLECTIVE CHALLENGE, THEREFORE, IS TO MEET BOTH THE SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE WE ARE PRIVILEGED TO SERVE. AS WE PURSUE OUR COMMON AGENDA IN THIS REGARD, LET US BE MINDFUL OF THE NEED FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE WHICH CAN ONLY COME ABOUT THROUGH RECONCILIATION.

I WISH YOU WELL IN YOUR DELIBERATIONS. IT MY HUMBLE PRAYER THAT THIS **AMECEA** PLENARY BEING HELD IN ZAMBIA, WILL SERVE AS A CATALYST IN YOUR QUEST TO DO BETTER FOR MANKIND MADE IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD.

MAY THE LORD ALMIGHTY RICHLY BLESS YOUR WORK AND LIFE OF SERVICE TO OTHERS.

IT IS NOW MY HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE TO DECLARE THE SIXTEENTH **AMECEA** PLENARY ASSEMBLY UNDER THE THEME “**RECONCILIATION THROUGH JUSTICE AND PEACE**”, FORMALLY OPEN.

MAY GOD BLESS ZAMBIA;

MAY GOD BLESS AFRICA;

MAY GOD BLESS THE CHURCH.

I THANK YOU.