

ZAMBIA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
Pastoral Statement on the Current Situation in Zimbabwe
10th June 2008

***“You must love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength,
and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself” [Luke 10:27]***

We, the Catholic Bishops of Zambia, have been closely watching the situation in Zimbabwe since the year 2000. We have followed the events in this neighbouring country as they took a downward and shocking turn after the 29 March 2008 general and presidential elections. Zimbabwe is on the brink of total economic collapse and political destruction and we consider it our duty to raise our voice in solidarity with the suffering people of this sister country and our region.

1. The suffering of God’s people anywhere does not go unnoticed by Him and He surely has seen the suffering of the people of Zimbabwe as it is said in Exodus, ***“I have seen the suffering of my people and have heard their cry of complaint so I know what they are suffering” [Exodus 3: 7].***

2. The suffering of our poor sisters and brothers is intolerable and beyond any political excuses. The total collapse of the economy of Zimbabwe, which was known as the bread basket of the sub-region, especially affects the poor in Zimbabwe. The political collapse or failure of government is shown by the terrible violence and attacks on the citizenry after the elections. These are verified by impartial observers, and we condemn them in the strongest terms possible. An environment of peace is essential for elections, not an environment of fear such as has been fostered by brutal attacks on those who are alleged or judged to have voted “in the wrong way!” The Message from the Heads of Christian Denominations in Zimbabwe, jointly signed by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, clearly speaks of “organised violence”. This is unacceptable.

3. We applaud the fact that our brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe have shown great resilience and restraint in the midst of an extremely volatile political situation, harsh economic conditions and untold misery as a result of physical abuse. This shows a great commitment to look for a just political process peacefully. We also acknowledge the courage of the civil society and many Church leaders in Zimbabwe who have prophetically endeavoured to speak out, as demonstrated in recent statements. The concern about the situation in Zimbabwe stems from our concern for all human beings. The situation in Zimbabwe since 2002 has affected us all in the Southern Region. For instance, the current tragic situation in South Africa is partly a result of what has been obtaining in Zimbabwe in the past eight years or so.

4. We raise our voice to add to that of the people of Zambia who love their brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe. This love was demonstrated over the years particularly from 11 November 1965 till democratic governance came to Zimbabwe in April 1980. Zambians

paid a very high price in supporting their sister country's liberation struggle. They sacrificed a promising economic future and rapid social development in order to walk with Zimbabweans on the road to freedom and democracy. The damage to Zambia's economy that this sacrifice brought about is immeasurable. Needless to say that some Zambians paid the supreme price; by losing their lives!

5. We therefore call upon the relevant authorities to ensure that this circle of violence is brought to a halt. As the country begins its preparations for the re-run of the presidential elections it is important that peace should prevail. Free and fair elections cannot be held in an atmosphere of intimidation, torture, and abductions. The current electoral commission in Zimbabwe has lost all credibility going by the manner in which it conducted the March 2008 general election. Therefore, for the run-off elections to be credible it is imperative to have international observers not just from SADC, AU, and EU but also from the United Nations. The rule of law must be re-established and should be particularly evaluated in terms of respect for the poor and defenceless – when we hear of so many casualties from violence, especially in poor rural areas, from whoever is perpetrating it, then we know that the rule of law has broken down and the very first commitment of the President and all his government officials must be to restore the law and order that protects the poor and defenceless – right away.

We appeal to all countries in this Region through their political leaders to speak out much more firmly for a settlement of peace and justice in the current crisis in Zimbabwe. Whilst we appreciate and commend the efforts of SADC at solving the problem we call upon the same SADC leaders to take much stronger action. Our appeal is the most appropriate and, indeed, the only credible response to the sufferings of our neighbours. Scripture says, *"...this is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God."* [Micah 6:8].

6. It is imperative for the international community, that is to say the AU and particularly SADC, to ensure that the Regime in Zimbabwe particularly the President, understand that the serious concern about democratic rule, respect for human rights, and the promotion of justice and peace is coming not so much from the international community, this concern and call is coming from our kith and kin, our brothers and sisters, namely the people of Zimbabwe first and foremost, the people of Zambia, the people in the SADC Region and indeed the whole of Africa. Whilst it may be true that some of the problems we face in Africa are a result of the colonial past, it is totally unacceptable to continually blame "**colonialists and imperialists**", for problems and misery that mistakes made by our leaders in Africa, and in this case Zimbabwe, have caused.

WAY FORWARD

7. We call upon governments in countries bordering Zimbabwe, including ours, to treat the Zimbabweans who are fleeing the violence and social dislocation at home, as genuine refugees who should be treated with the compassion and dignity they deserve. We deplore the abuse that some refugees, especially women, are being subjected to by people in some border areas who are taking advantage of their desperate situation. We

ask our dioceses to receive any refugees with open arms of Christian and African hospitality, and to assist in any way those who are suffering so much.

8. It has to be brought to bear on the government of Zimbabwe to ensure that political violence is immediately brought to an end. The necessary processes and procedures for the re-run must be swiftly dealt with in a transparent manner.

9. We encourage the Church in Zimbabwe to remain vigilant and continue to raise a prophetic voice against all cases of social injustice. We urge them to speak candidly to the people to guide them on the way forward for the country.

10. We call upon the people of Zimbabwe to remain steadfast and refuse to be intimidated in their quest for better governance and greater democracy.

We, on our part, shall continue to pray for a peaceful end to the crisis in Zimbabwe. We encourage our sisters and brothers in Zimbabwe not to lose hope because God has never and will never abandon his own.

“I will betroth you to myself forever, betroth you with integrity and justice, with tenderness and love; I will betroth you to myself with faithfulness and you will come to know Yahweh” [Hosea 2:21-22]

10th June 2008

Signed:

Rt. Rev. George Zumaire Lungu	Bishop of Chipata, ZEC President
Rt. Rev. Noel O'Regan, SMA	Bishop of Ndola, ZEC Vice-President
Most Rev. Telesphore-George Mpundu	Archbishop of Lusaka
Most Rev. James Spaita	Archbishop of Kasama
Most Rev Medardo J. Mazombwe	Archbishop Emeritus of Lusaka
Rt. Rev Aaron A. Chisha	Bishop of Mansa
Rt. Rev. Raymond Mpezele	Bishop of Livingstone
Rt. Rev. Paul Duffy, OMI	Bishop of Mongu
Rt. Rev. Emilio Patriarca	Bishop of Monze
Rt. Rev. Alick Banda	Bishop of Solwezi
Very Rev. Robert Lavertu, M.Afr.	Apostolic Administrator of Mpika