

ZAMBIA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

**A SPEECH DELIVERED BY
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BISHOP OF MONGU AND BISHOP DIRECTOR FOR
CARITAS ZAMBIA, DURING THE 2016 MEDIA DAY
HELD ON FRIDAY 4TH NOVEMBER 2016
UNDER THE THEME**

“A FREE AND JUST SOCIETY IN UNITY AND DIVERSITY”

- Journalists and other media workers
- Invited Guests from the various partner organizations
- Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that at the invitation of the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), formerly Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC), we have gathered here to interact with you who we believe are very critical members of our society. You the media are referred to as the fourth estate in a functional democracy because the other three arms of government require your active and free participation to enhance the protection and defense of the rights of individuals and that of society. As you may be aware, this is the second time that ZCCB is holding this an annual event dubbed - The ZCCB Media Day.

The event is meant for you the media to meet with us so that we can reflect on some of the socio-economic and political issues that affect us in our country. In doing so, ZCCB hopes to share with you some of the key activities that we carry out through different departments. You will also have an opportunity to see and speak to our people in the dioceses who work with the communities to promote integral development in Zambia. We believe that you, the Journalists, are our conduits of various messages that we put in the public domain even as we exercise our prophetic mandate. Without you, I doubt if our rebranding of the Conference from ZEC to ZCCB would have been heard of.

We thank you so much for giving us space in your newspapers, inviting us to your radio and TV programmes.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to draw your attention to the theme of our interaction this afternoon: **“A free and just society in unity and diversity.”** As Church, this theme could not have come at a better time. Our country Zambia should be a free and just society. A society where people are united and peaceful towards one another, despite having divergent views on social, political, economic,

religious and indeed many other issues. Since this is generally a gathering of scribes, let me state that what we have seen in the recent past concerning the attacks on the media by way of intimidation, harassing key news sources and in extreme cases shutting them down, is, we believe, an assault on media freedoms and is not desirable in a democracy. If the media is intimidated and closed, injustices will become a norm as they will be no one to expose them. The media should be allowed to operate freely, following their own ethics not according to the ethics of politicians and other pressure groups whose interests are at variance with the demands of social justice.

Free media helps in the democratization of any society. It is the vehicle through which individuals debate the issues of the day and actively join in the processes of decision-making that shape the country. Free press serves the right to stand up and be counted, to be an active player in the democracy and not be a passive spectator.

Free media is also an essential contributor to a system of checks and balances, operating as a restraint on tyranny, corruption, ineptitude and impunity!

The Catholic Church in Zambia would like to remind the government and its auxiliary agents that freedom of the press demands the respect and protection of the right to obtain and

publish information or opinions without government censorship or fear of punishment. This should be applicable to all types of printed and broadcast material, including books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, films, radio and television programs.

It is easy to believe that freedom of the press is only pertinent to the institution of journalism and those who comprise it. But the purpose of the provision extends far beyond the news media; it secures the freedom of expression of the entire society.

Zambia is coming from an election that resulted in unprecedented violence before, during and after the polls. Since the government has already set up a commission of inquiry, obviously ignoring the various voices, we demand total impartiality in whatever the commission is going to do and say in the final analysis. We believe that if this inquiry is premised on fixing offenders, then it is misplaced. The inquiry should be premised on healing the nation.

Invited Guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

No one will doubt the fact that Zambia's ethnic groupings have been knitted tightly, thanks partly to our fore fathers and mothers of that time who desired to build a united nation

expressed in our national motto: *One Zambia, One Nation*. Therefore, it was and still is a very strange development that people can start attacking each other on ethnic lines. There is need for the spirit of true reconciliation to flow from the top government leadership to the lowest organs of the state and the community. Zambia cannot afford to continue like this in the state that it is. What we saw in the last elections, where youths were used to perpetuate violence, should not be repeated.

The involvement of youths is key to achieving National growth and development. Government should take seriously the challenges Zambian youths face today: limited access to resources, education, training, employment and economic opportunities. The energy, vision and potential for transformative change that youths carry should not be wasted. They should have access to resources that are free from political strings to realize their potential.

The Church is doing what it can to promote integral development. In a short while, you shall see and hear what we are doing to supplementing government's efforts not only for the youth but for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, on the other hand, Zambia returned to multi-party democracy and we have seen how many political parties we have. This is very healthy for a democracy.

Therefore, these political parties must be given an environment to thrive because they are a potential Government. We always say – government in waiting. The public newspapers and the national broadcaster must not be a preserve for the ruling party alone. Political party leaders should be allowed to interact with their constituents without fear of the Public Order Act. If we take the route of stifling the work of the opposition, then we also stifle the growth of our democracy. Further, the Zambia Police Service should not segregate some political parties on the application of the Public Order Act. What the country experience lately on the application of the Public Order is one of the root causes for violence, mistrust and division.

Ladies and gentlemen, too often, we repeat the phrase: ‘unity in diversity.’ But what is this very ‘thing’?

Unity in diversity is a concept of "unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation" that shifts focus from unity based on a mere tolerance of physical, cultural, linguistic, social, religious, political, ideological and/or psychological differences towards a more complex unity based on an understanding that difference enriches human interactions.

We should nurture this for our society as a beauty and value given to humanity by God. It has existed for many years with

different traditions, ethnicity, and ideas, religious and political affiliation.

Unity in diversity is responsible for enhancing the quality of teamwork. Unity is instrumental in resolving social problems because people from different cultural backgrounds tend to know and respect each other.

Zambia should therefore be a shining example of unity in diversity because it allows people of different religions to live together in a peaceful manner. This country should continue on this path regardless of belonging to different political persuasion.

Finally, I invite you to ensure that you visit the other hall so that you can see and get a glimpse of what the Catholic Church is doing in Zambia. Once more and on behalf of the Catholic Bishops, I thank you for the coverage that you always give us.

Thank you and May God bless you all!