



**A PASTORAL LETTER ISSUED BY  
THE ZAMBIA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE (ZEC)  
ON THE AUGUST 2016 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

**“NO LONGER WILL VIOLENCE BE HEARD IN YOUR LAND”  
(Isaiah 60:18)**

**A CALL TO PEACEFUL, CREDIBLE AND TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS**

**PREAMBLE**

1. To all members of the Catholic Church and all people of good will. We greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in the words of St. Paul: *“Now, may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all”* (2 Th. 3:16).
2. As we are near the election day of 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016, we are compelled by the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14) to once again speak to the nation on matters relating to the electoral process. For us, every election is a moment of grace and an opportunity for self-appraisal as a nation. It is not only about the election of political leaders but as we have said before, it is an opportune time to review our past performance in order to prepare for better political choices for the future. It is also a time to celebrate our democratic independence as opposed to anxiety.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF ELECTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH**

3. We write this pastoral letter to you Catholics and people of goodwill in Zambia to remind you of your duty to elect leaders and of the need to maintain peace before, during and after the polling day. While each individual Catholic has the God-given right and freedom to decide on who to vote for

and how to answer the referendum question, the teaching of the Church can offer you some valuable guidance in an attempt to reach an informed judgement that advances the common good as it noted by The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its *Doctrinal note Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* which states that “*the primary function of the Church is to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good*” (#1).

4. The Church believes that once people maintain and strengthen their democracy, they stand a better chance of actively participating and shaping the development of their country (**Cf. ZEC Pastoral Letter - Building for Peace, 1996**). In addition, St. John Paul II taught in his encyclical that: “*The Church values the democratic system in as much as it ensures active participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate*” (Cf. St. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* – ‘One Hundred Years,’ 1991, #46). Further, Pope Benedict XVI notes that: “... *elections represent a platform for the expression of people’s decisions, and they are a sign of legitimacy for the exercise of power... [Free and Fair] elections provide a privileged opportunity for healthy and serene public debate, marked by respect for different opinions and different political grouping...*” (Cf. *Africae Munus*, #81).
5. Therefore, as we move towards the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016 general elections, we call upon all people who mean well for Zambia to vigorously fight the many vices that have a potential to undermine our democracy and subsequently distort our electoral process and rob our people of their free will.

## **CONDITIONS FOR PEACEFUL, CREDIBLE AND TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS**

6. As we have often noted, the free will of the people is the hallmark of any credible election. We must therefore pay particular attention to key aspects that can enhance or reduce and even negate the credibility of the forthcoming elections. Some of the key conditions for any elections to be peaceful, credible and transparent include:

### **a) Peaceful Atmosphere**

- 6.1 Democracy requires in the first place that all citizens exercise their right to vote in a free and peaceful environment. Much as we are proudly acclaimed for being a peaceful country, we should never take things for granted. Given the increasing incidents of politically motivated violence and continued tension between members of political parties, our record of being peaceful is increasingly being threatened.
- 6.2 We are deeply saddened by the increasing number of cases of political violence in the run-up to the August 2016 Elections. We are extremely disappointed because the current trend is contrary to the commitment that was made to the nation by the 19 Heads of Political Parties at an Indaba held on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2016 and facilitated by the three Church Mother Bodies (namely the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC), the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ) and the Evangelical

Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ). The Zambian people were expectant and hopeful that the signing of the communiqué by the leaders of political parties would yield positive results.

- 6.3 We have noted that the senior leaders of political parties themselves are the ones to be blamed for this violence because they know who the perpetrators of this violence are. The habit of finger pointing and blame shifting is making violence to escalate because of individual political leaders not taking responsibility when things go wrong. While some have announced abhorrence of violence at some political rallies of late, the condemnatory voices have not been strong enough to deter various political cadres who have continued to fan violence in different parts of the country. We lament the fact that the current spate of violence may have a serious impact on the voter turnout as many eligible voters might fear going to vote due to security concerns.
- 6.4 We therefore urge all the politicians across the political divide to make every effort in ensuring an effective way of cadre management and to immediately tone down their confrontational rhetoric. What Zambians are expecting is for them to focus on key governance and developmental issues that will help the electorate to make informed decisions.

**b) Impartial Media**

- 6.5 The role of the media in the electoral process cannot be over emphasised. All players in the electoral process need access to the mass media to propagate their agendas and programmes in a more efficient way. An impartial media that will treat every player equally is therefore cardinal. Having said this, we believe that both public and private media should adhere to the principle and ethics of fairness and truth.
- 6.6 **The Public Media** bears more responsibility given that it is sustained on public funds. All tax payers, regardless of their political inclinations, are therefore shareholders in the public media bodies. Any leverage given to a political party or candidate facilitates undue advantage for that political party or candidate and therefore manipulates the playing field. We urge the public media to be professional, ensure full and fair coverage of all political parties.
- 6.7 We also want to see a **private and community based** media that remain professional, accommodative and inclusive in its covering of issues. We also want a responsible use and reception of social media. Further we urge all the consumers of the media outlets to be critical of the messages they receive from various media because it is not everything that they read, hear or watch contain the truth especially the information they get from the social media.
- 6.8 All in all, we want to see a media that is *“professional by reporting truthfully, objectively and factually as they inform the public. We want to see a media landscape that is not polarized where the public media is pro-ruling party while the private media is pro-opposition parties. Whichever media platform one uses, should not fuel hate speech or insults in the name of the right to freely express oneself.”* (**Let there be Peace Among Us** – A ZEC Pastoral Statement issued on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2016, #s 27 & 28).

### **c) Professional Enforcement of law and order by the Police**

6.9 We know that it is the duty of the police to protect life and property and above all to maintain law and order. We call upon the Zambia Police Service to perform their duties of maintaining law and order professionally and effectively without undue pressure from partisan influence. They should be impartial and apply the law fairly to anyone who breaks the laws of this country. There have also been concerns on the implementation of the Public Order Act and we have made calls in the past that the police should implement the Public Order Act in the most appropriate manner by ensuring that they do not exercise any inconsistencies or biases when dealing with different groups of people for any alleged offences or when political parties have provided notices for the holding of their public meetings and political rallies. Above all, the Zambia Police should be seen to be serving and protecting the Zambian people fairly and equally.

### **d) The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ)**

6.10 The ECZ is the legally constituted body mandated to manage our elections in such a manner that the right of the people to choose their leaders is unfettered. Given the many pressures exerted on the ECZ by various interest groups during election time, there is need for high levels of integrity by ECZ officers. ECZ should not be seen to be an institution that is being manipulated to suit the interest of one group or political party. The legitimacy of its work will depend on how much the ECZ is seen to be independent in the eyes of the public. We therefore urge the honourable Commissioners and ECZ staff to remain resolute and professionally conduct their business in providing the necessary mechanisms in the electoral process that will guarantee free and fair elections. The ECZ officers must remember that *“The Lord demands fairness in every business deal; he sets the standards” (Prov. 16:11)*. Of course, we acknowledge that this is not an easy task. At the same time, we know that the task is possible. The ECZ also needs to work closely with other relevant actors to ensure adherence to the Electoral Code of Conduct by all during the upcoming elections. In most of our elections, the code of conduct has been observed more in breach than in compliance. We hope that this trend shall be reversed henceforth.

## **WHO SHOULD WE VOTE FOR**

7. Many times questions are asked for the Church to name a specific party or candidate whom all Christians should rally behind. Some mischievous politicians have even accused the Church of supporting one political party or another. On the other hand, some politicians have used the name of the Church to gain political mileage. The Church does not and will not support or prop up a particular political party or candidate. That is the free choice it leaves to its flock. The Church embraces members from diverse political persuasions and jealously protects their freedom of association. Nonetheless, based on our Christian principles, the Church can provide some guidance

that could help its members make informed choices among the many candidates and political parties that present themselves for election.

8. Drawing from the Social Teaching of Church, the qualities that candidates for political office should have are following: *professional competence on political, economic and social programmes, courage to speak out the truth, concern for social justice, desire to work for the common good instead of self-enrichment, disposition to use power for service, especially service of the poor and under-privileged, openness to dialogue, good moral standing, transparency and accountability to the electorate (Cf. Building for Peace, # 11)*. Above all Christians should realise that they have a moral responsibility to vote for candidates who follow the example of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve and who emptied himself for the good of all (Cf. Mk 10:41-45). We must also call to mind the valuable advice given by Jethro to Moses: ***“But choose from the people at large some capable and God-fearing men, trustworthy and incorruptible, and appoint them as leaders of the people ...” (Ex 18:21)***. Therefore, *Christians should not vote for candidates who are arrogant with a propensity to use violence, people with questionable moral standing, those with proven record of corruption and abuse of power and public resources and those who put narrow sectarian or ethnic interest before national interest and the common good.*

## **REFERENDUM ON THE REVISED BILL OF RIGHTS**

9. We share the anxiety of many citizens in Zambia on the issue of referendum even as we are near our August elections this year. Little has been done by concerned government bodies to popularise the new and expanded draft Bill of Rights. Again, time seems to be against us in terms of making our people truly and objectively understand the contents of the said Bill and what they will be voting for or against in the proposed Referendum Question: *Do you agree to the amendment to the Constitution of Zambia and to repeal and replace Article 79 of the Zambian Constitution?* We are aware that some critical concerns have been raised in terms of the complexity of the Referendum Question itself as well as the symbols attached to it. On the other hand, it is our considered view that many of the constitutional changes we need to make that could improve the people’s quality of life and dignity hinge on reforming the current Bill of Rights. It is therefore imperative that more effort is made by both government and non-governmental actors, including the Church, to educate the people on the forthcoming elections and counsel them to vote wisely without coercing them to vote either yes or no.

## **OUR APPEAL**

10. We call upon all Zambians who registered as voters to turn up and cast their votes during the voting day. Voting is not only a right but also a duty to the country to help identify and put in place credible people who will make the state function in the promotion of the common good. Never get tired of voting, as your apathy will only give greater chance to opportunists to carry the day. Take interest in voter education conducted by non-partisan Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), attend rallies of various political parties and candidates and listen to what they have to say. This will help enrich your knowledge when deciding which candidate or party to vote for.

11. To you our dear political leaders, we hereby present the following advice from the Lord: *“But it shall not be so among you; whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man himself came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10: 43-45)*. We appeal to all of you political parties to respect the views of others. If you truly want to be chosen for national governance, then you should show commitment to the common good that transcends partisan interests. If elected, you will have a duty to all, including those who are not your members or did not vote for you and your party.
12. Further we call upon all **Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)** to play an important role in educating, organising and mobilising the public. We call upon them to redouble their efforts in facilitating citizens to make meaningful participation in our electoral process. They should promote voter literacy, organise people against apathy and challenge all actors in the electoral process to behave in an objective manner that respects the rights of other players in the process.
13. We call upon organisations intending to monitor the elections to be adequately prepared for this task. Monitors and observers should be fully trained to understand our electoral system and procedures and also to acquire skills on how they can critically track, systematically analyse and objectively report on election events without causing unnecessary alarm and anxiety. They owe it to the public to do a good job. They should be equally independent and free from manipulation and give the public truthful information about the proceedings of the elections.
14. To our most esteemed **members of the clergy**, we exhort you to continue playing the God-given mandate of being a prophetic voice in our society. However, do it in a non-partisan manner and without sacrificing your objectivity. Never tire of proclaiming the message of truth, justice, peace, love, unity, forgiveness and reconciliation. As St. Paul exhorts us: *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:9)*.
15. Further, we again appeal particularly to our own **Catholic priests** to remain non-partisan. As we clearly stated in our statement at the beginning of the year: *“The Church law is very clear on this (Cf. Canon Law 285 and Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2442). It is morally wrong for the Catholic priest to use the pulpit to campaign for, or de-campaign any political party or parties. In as much as we welcome Catholic politicians to celebrate Mass with us, they must not be given any platform to speak during liturgical celebrations” (Cf. **Let there be Peace Among Us**, #31)*.
16. To our dear lay faithful, we call upon you to get involved in the electoral process. Politics are not dirty; they are contaminated by us people. It is our Christian duty to participate in the civic life of our society. After all, the Gospel challenges you to be **“the salt of the earth ... and ... the light of the world...” (Mt 5: 13-14)**. Use opportunities availed by your structures and programmes to educate yourselves on election issues and urge your members to get involved as voters, and monitors. Finally, use the remaining days to dedicate prayers for the success of the elections but also offer ourselves to God to be his instruments in transforming the society into a better world. As already pointed out, you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Politics must therefore taste differently where you have been involved. This indeed should be your footprint.

17. We make a special appeal to you, the youth, with the conviction that you have a greater stake in the future of this nation. We challenge you to be architects of a better Zambia by being agents of peace and reconciliation. We appeal to our youth to “refuse to be used as mere tools of violence by politicians” (**Let there be peace among us, # 26**)

## CONCLUSION

18. In conclusion, we appeal to all Zambians to realise that voting is one of their fundamental rights and duties. It is also a Christian duty. It is a means through which citizens peacefully and freely choose their leaders. We thus pray that all citizens enter the August 11 general elections with a spirit of honesty, avoiding bribes and cheating. We also pray that all voters, political party leaders and their cadres may have at heart, the needed passion and commitment to build for peace and avoid all forms of violence. As St. Paul exhorts us, **“Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody” (Romans 12:18)**. We also call to mind the inspiring Word of God: **“For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11)**. These words from prophet Jeremiah are a clear testimony of what God desires for all His people. God wants nothing more than to see his people enjoy the fullness of life. However, God needs our cooperation as his people to ensure that this hope for a better future becomes a reality. The coming elections offer us an opportunity to elect leaders with the necessary attributes and vision that can bring about this better future. May God bless our nation!

**Issued at Kapingila House, Lusaka, on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2016 and signed by:**

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- + Most Rev. Ignatius Chama - *Archbishop of Kasama*
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