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HAKAINDE HICHILEMA — 7TH PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

Address to the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

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Location: United Nations Headquarters, New York, USA

Occasion: 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Your Excellency Ambassador Kʼrösi, President of the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly;

Your Excellency Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the U.N.;

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government;

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

First, we congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election as the 77th President of the U.N. General Assembly. With your vast experience, we are confident that you will successfully provide the required leadership during your tenure as President of the General Assembly. We pay tribute, of course, in the same manner, to Mr. Abdulla Shahid for his unwavering dedication and good stewardship during the 76th Session of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

Your Excellencies, we meet here at a very difficult time—a time when global challenges have not only multiplied but have become more complex. Such challenges include the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, the war in Ukraine and associated effects of the supply chain disruptions, food insecurity around the world, the high commodity and energy prices, as well as the overall high cost of living which have cast a dark shadow on the attainment of the SDGs on our continent and the world. The risk of reversal in the hard-won developmental gains is ever so real.

COVID-19 unmasked the global inequalities which stretch well beyond income and political boundaries, as evidenced through the varied access to vaccines. The risk of further inequality is also real, especially for us developing countries which have inadequate capacity to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change despite our insignificant carbon footprint. Sadly so. This is truly a defining moment of our time where collective efforts must be channelled to address the numerous challenges that we face.

Mr. President,

It is why Zambia welcomes the challenge on building our common agenda and endorse the call to convene the Summit of the Future. We call for the attainment of a “Pact for the Future” that underwrites a new form of multilateralism in our world—one where major challenges are faced together in solidarity within the context of a revitalised international order that is: number one, rules-based; number two, fair and inclusive; number three, with the United Nations at the centre of it all.

As a country with two-thirds of our population below the age of 25, the outlook on the future and emphasis on intergenerational equity is so important to us. Our government seeks to harness this demographic dividend by investing in its youthful population and energetic

members of our population for a better future. We therefore support the establishment of the U.N. Youth Office at the U.N. here. This should encourage meaningful youth engagement in diverse ways, such as in political representation, access to lifelong skills training and education, support to youth innovation and indeed entrepreneurship, decision-making, and all the spheres of life, including climate change and environmental protection.

Mr. President,

In spite of the steady progress made towards calming the COVID-19 pandemic, we still need to remain vigilant to guard against the possibility of its resurgence. As the world continues to recover from this pandemic, it is therefore necessary to find lasting solutions, including investment in resilient health systems that respond to future pandemics. This entails the establishment of a versatile international public health regime that will be devoid of hoarding vaccines and related technologies to guarantee rapid deployment of supplies indeed from a global reserve to tackle future pandemics.

Mr. President,

The re-emergence of polio in our world is of great concern and as such Zambia is participating in supplementary immunisation activities along with a number of countries in our region in order to prevent and halt the spread of wild poliovirus type 1. This is in addition to ongoing activities to fight other vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, as well as to strengthen our routine immunisation and maintain essential health services for maternal and child health. As the Global Cholera Control Champion—and many thanks to the WHO who gave us this opportunity to serve in this role—our fight against cholera must continue with vigour, relentlessly with vigour. We also need to remain alert to any possible outbreaks of monkeypox, Ebola virus, and indeed other threats in our world.

The International Community must work together to address the growing threat to environmental, human, and animal health resulting from antimicrobial resistance, commonly referred to as drug resistance. Bacterial infections continue to cause millions of deaths where, for example, sub-Saharan Africa has the greatest burden accounting for a greater proportion of deaths in our region. This calls for greater control systems in access to antimicrobial medicines for both human and animal use.

I shall now focus on other areas of interest: economic performance. Mr. President, the Ukraine crisis has hampered the recovery that was slowly taking hold, particularly in the developing world where large sections of our society remain in extreme poverty and the inequalities widened by the day. With the attainment of the SDGs off-track, countries must intensify national consultative processes and renew commitments to poverty reduction, support debt restructuring, and enhance access to concessional finance—very important to our own development agendas in our individual countries. On our part, we hereby indicate in this regard our intention to present our second Voluntary National Review in July 2023 to highlight Zambia's progress towards Sustainable Development Goals achievement.

Despite the challenges in the external environment, we are resolved to rebuild the Zambian economy, and this resolve remains stronger than ever before. Our economic recovery is on track, Mr. President, evidenced by the positive growth indicators and stabilisation of key macro variables such as interest rates, exchange rate market stability, and inflation—which we have been able to pull down from 25 percent to well under 9.8 percent in just one year of being in office. Mr. President, Zambia is on a path of growth from the economic contraction that we experienced in the past.

Our commitment to providing equal opportunities, especially for the young people, has been demonstrated by the introduction of free primary and secondary education, as we believe that education is the best equaliser, the best investment, and the best inheritance. Without doubt, consistent with our pledge to invest in human capital, we have recruited over 30,000 teachers and 11,000 health workers in 2022 alone. We are decentralising, Mr. President, our service delivery and have increased the allocation of the Constituency Development Fund by over a thousand percentage points in our first budget in office. Just the beginning.

We are pleased to note that we have reached in principle agreement with our creditors under the Common Framework to restructure the national debt which we inherited, and have effectively concluded an IMF deal based on our more important homegrown economic transformation plan. We say many thanks to the International Monetary Fund, to the World Bank, and basically the U.N. system and other cooperating partners for your support.

Mr. President,

The adverse effects of climate change have continued to ravage our planet. Allow me to cite a situation in Zambia where recently one half of our country experienced total crop failure due to extreme drought and another half experienced floods in one season. This is obviously not normal. As Chair of the African Group of Negotiators on climate change, Mr. President, Zambia calls for enhanced global efforts which should include increased financial support for countries with limited resources.

Zambia has continued to build on the efforts of attaining gender equality. Based on empirical evidence, women empowerment and poverty alleviation are positively correlated. It is therefore imperative that we dedicate corresponding efforts to ensure that gender disparities are curtailed at all levels. Mr. President, Zambia is championing the campaign to end child marriage in Africa and of course in the world. This morning, Zambia, Canada, and other cooperating partners held a side event to review commitments from the International Community towards ending child, early, and forced marriages.

International Peace, Security, and Stability. Mr. President, Zambia believes that without peace and stability, our joint developmental efforts are in vain. We are committed to remaining strong advocates of peace and stability in Southern Africa, the entire African continent, and the world over. Our guiding principle is that instability, Mr. President, anywhere is instability everywhere. This reminds us that ending war and conflict is not only the responsibility of those that are directly involved, but it is a shared obligation of every global citizen.

As the incoming Chair of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, Zambia prioritises the restoration of peace and stability in our own country to start with, and the region, as it is said, Mr. President, charity begins at home. Going forward, our U.N. system should, we argue Mr. President, tilt more efforts towards prevention of conflicts, which is more cost-effective and palatable.

Mr. President,

Zambia joins other governments in expressing particular concern about the ongoing war in Ukraine. We stand with all those affected. We also take this opportunity to stress the far-reaching negative consequences of this war, particularly on the prices of food across the world, fuel, fertiliser, and other key commodities. War in any part of the world, Mr. President, has a damaging effect on economic activity which derails our collective fight against poverty and hunger. Mr. President, a few months of war can arrest decades of progress. I shall repeat this: a few months of war can arrest decades of progress. We therefore categorically condemn war anywhere and we continue to urge all parties involved to pursue diplomatic solutions.

U.N. Reforms. Mr. President, global ambitions toward peace and security largely depend on the effectiveness of the United Nations Security Council. The inadequacies of the current structure, however, have become increasingly pronounced, with the seeding of decision-making to the General Assembly. We appreciate the call from President Biden for greater inclusivity. We therefore continue to advance the African common position as espoused in the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration to ensure the effectiveness, credibility, and legitimacy of our U.N. Security Council.

In conclusion, Mr. President, we wish to reaffirm Zambia's commitment to the fundamental principles which the United Nations was founded upon, which safeguard our shared future of peace and prosperity for all nations—not for some nations, I shall emphasise, but

peace and stability and prosperity for all nations.

Mr. President,

I thank you for your kind attention.