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HAKAINDE HICHILEMA — 7TH PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

President Hakainde Hichilema Speech at State Banquet with Ghana President JD Mahama

Date: 05 February 2026

Location: Lusaka, Zambia

Occasion: State Banquet

Thank you very much. Let me acknowledge our gracious visitor, President of the Republic of Ghana, President John Dramani Mahama; his dear wife; let me also recognise my wife—two ladies seated with us at the high table.

Let me recognise cabinet colleagues from both Ghana and Zambia; let me recognise our service chiefs. But more importantly—not that the others are not important—our former leaders that are here, former Vice Presidents. I have sighted two of them. Mr. President, those former Vice Presidents, I choose to call them "Vice Presidents" because once you are Vice President, you always remain a Vice President. They served in different governments and different political parties, but they are gracious and available all the time when we need their counsel, so we recognise them also. Former leaders and ministers that are present.

Let me recognise the business community from Ghana and, of course, from Zambia. It is my honour to also recognise the diplomatic corps that are present, our cooperating partners, and leaders of international organisations that are here at this dinner as we honour our visitors. I must also say, distinguished ladies and gentlemen and the media that is present.

Let me continue by simply saying once more, Mr. President, my brother, how grateful we are as Zambians that you accepted our invitation for a State Visit. We are also happy that we were able to reach consensus on the structure of this State Visit. Both of us are not too concerned with excessive protocols; politics is important as it brought us into offices, but the importance of working on the economic side of our partnership is very, very important.

I am happy to say that since the President came in this morning, at our bilateral meetings we covered a lot of ground. First, to retrace our roots: the Ghana-Zambia partnership. The path drawn by those who came before us—President Kwame Nkrumah and President Kenneth David Buchizya Kaunda—in creating this partnership that was anchored, as the President will say a bit more, on Pan-Africanism. The two leaders, together with their colleagues, were instrumental in creating the framework that we have today as the African Union, and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity.

We also quickly gravitated to how our peoples are connected—Ghanaians and Zambians—to the extent of something really intricate. I have never understood how Ghanaians and Zambians click very quickly whenever they meet, to a point where we now have a lot of intermarriages. Ghanaians married to Zambians and Zambians married to Ghanaians. In fact, one of the presidential assistants is married to a beautiful Ghanaian lady, so he is just following in the path of many Zambians that have gone that route. I am talking about the bond between Ghanaians and Zambians—yes, government to government, but also people to people and families. Very important.

But more importantly today, we spent time to look at the MOUs we signed before my visit to Ghana in 2023 and pulled that together with what we have been able to execute today. We are focusing on solidifying our history and relationship, but anchoring that on the knowledge that without a strong economic bond, investment, and trade, we would basically be having a relationship that cannot be easily oiled. It is financial and economic success that will support these other aspects of our relationship.

I am very pleased to say to the gathering today that my brother and I spent quite some time together. We wanted to talk first, just the two of us. As we were talking, he was talking and I was listening to him, and I was saying, "But that's our hymn sheet! How come he's talking and singing our hymn?" Obviously, what is the message here? Ghana's reforms, economic focus, and debt issues—how they came out of debt and how we did it ourselves (not completely out of it, but restructuring our debts)—reveal very similar paths.

We now are saying we want to do more. Ghana and Zambia must do more, intentionally and deliberately. Those will be the critical building blocks. Yes, the Ghana-Zambia relationship and other bilateral relationships are building blocks towards the African Continental Free Trade Area. We are very, very happy—and Zambians, I would like us to acknowledge the fact that Ghana is host to the Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade today. Let us congratulate Ghana for that major achievement. Zambia fully supports Ghana, and we want to see Ghana succeed in helping us walk through what has been missing for too long on the continent: Africa does the least trade with itself. It is criminal, it is taboo, and it is unacceptable. You look at the size collectively of the African economy, and then look at what we do with each other—it is very, very little.

So, President, I agree that we should stop complaining. We should take the leadership, leading our countries and our regional blocs into a different structure—one which understands the opportunities that exist within our continent and exploits those opportunities. We must do more with each other: invest together and trade one country to another. I think then we will be answering what I may call a vexation which has been unnecessary for too long. We must give opportunities to our youthful populations through education.

Again, we share a lot. We shared numbers on what both of us have been able to achieve. We believe other countries on the continent will be looking at Ghana and Zambia carefully—not that we are the best, but we learn from each other. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. We looked at the mining space and what Ghana has been doing in the gold sector. We explained to the President that we never really defined ourselves as a gold-holding country; we defined ourselves by copper, cobalt, nickel, and manganese. But the gold is there in our country, and we are having challenges managing the sector properly here. Ghanaians have been at it for longer, and today we were able to share experiences.

In the early days of our presidency, I sent the Minister of Mines to Ghana, but today we were able to pull the story together in a much better way, looking at the large sector players and the small-to-medium artisans. Ghana has found solutions because of their many years of mining gold, and so we are happy to work with them in that space. Collectively, we think we will be better countries and better economies by collaborating.

I see members of parliament from the UPND, from the opposition, and independents here. This is the way democracy must work. We must all gather together when we have dignified guests like President Mahama. That is what the Zambian spirit is all about.

With all that I have said, Mr. President, we want to say we wish you long life and successful leadership of the people, government, and economy of Ghana. We obviously also wish your family well. If the people of Ghana are better, the people of Zambia will be in a good space, and vice versa.

May we rise to toast for all of this. I would say: a toast to President Mahama and the lasting friendship between the two countries, Ghana and Zambia. Cheers!

Thank you.