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HAKAINDE HICHILEMA — 7TH PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

Speech During the Official Opening of the First Session of the Thirteenth National Assembly

Date: 10 September 2021

Location: National Assembly, Lusaka

Occasion: Opening of the 1st Session of the 13th National Assembly

Introduction

Madam Speaker,

It is a great honour for me to be here today to address this August house on the official opening of the first session of the Thirteenth National Assembly. This session marks the beginning of my first five-year mandate as President of the Republic of Zambia and I am honoured to be the first president to address this August house, in the presence of the first female speaker of the house. I thank the almighty God for giving me and the United Party for National Development, the opportunity to serve the people of this great country. My profound gratitude goes to the people of Zambia for overwhelmingly electing me as their president. I am truly humbled by the responsibility that you, the Zambian people, have placed in our hands. We, in turn, shall serve you diligently and in accordance with your aspirations.

Obituaries

Madam Speaker,

On Thursday, 17th June this year, a dark cloud befell our country. We lost our gallant founding father and first president of this great nation, Dr. Kenneth David Kaunda. We are grateful for his immense contribution to the liberation struggle of not only our country, but also other countries in the region and beyond. We, as a people, miss him and shall forever be grateful to the almighty God for giving us such a great son of Africa. Barely three days after the death of our founding father, we lost yet another gallant Zambian, our chief justice, her ladyship Mrs. Irene Chirwa Mambilima, who passed away on 20th June, 2021. We remember her valuable contribution to the judiciary and service to the nation. Additionally, our country endured further despair resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, where many of our loved ones passed away. It is, therefore, important that this August house observes a minute of silence in honour of our late luminaries and the citizens who succumbed to the coronavirus.

(Pause for a minute of silence)

May their souls rest in eternal peace.

Congratulations

Madam Speaker,

Allow me, on this auspicious occasion, to congratulate you and the two deputy speakers on your respective election to superintend the affairs of this August house. The responsibility placed on your shoulders is onerous. Our people expect you to discharge your duties with impartiality, dignity and honour. I am confident that you will execute your duties diligently and maintain the decorum of the house. I also congratulate all of you, the re-elected and newly elected members of parliament, on your election to represent the people of Zambia. I equally congratulate you honourable members, who have been nominated to this August house. The people of Zambia have placed great confidence in you. The people of Zambia voted for change. Our people must begin to enjoy the fruits of this change. Your presence in this house should, therefore, not be for personal gain. We must all preoccupy ourselves with a call to duty and selfless service for the betterment of our country. You are expected to represent them effectively in order to contribute towards improving their livelihoods.

Let us work hard and deliver to our people's expectations.

Commendations

Madam Speaker,

Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the immediate past speaker, Dr. Patrick Matibini and the two former deputy speakers, Ms. Catherine Namugala and Mr. Mwimba Malama, for presiding over the business of the house. I also commend the clerk of the national assembly, Mrs. Cecilia Nsenduluka Mbewe, and her staff for the support rendered to the house during the twelfth national assembly. As a nation, we were happy that, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic during the fourth and fifth sessions of the twelfth national assembly, the leadership at parliament was innovative and worked tirelessly to ensure that the business of the house was conducted in an effective and efficient manner.

Madam Speaker,

Let me also pay special tribute to the former Vice-President of the Republic of Zambia and leader of government business, Her Honour Mrs. Inonge Mutukwa Wina. Her contribution to the successful conduct of business of the house will always be appreciated. I am confident that the new Vice-President, Her Honour Mrs. Mutale Nalumango, will certainly be equal to the task as leader of government business in the house.

2021 General Elections

Madam Speaker,

I am happy to note that the August, 2021 general elections were held successfully. Despite isolated incidents of violence recorded before, during and after voting, the elections were generally peaceful. The overwhelming support of the Zambian people carried the UPND to victory, in the midst of enormous efforts to suppress our freedom of movement and other democratic rights. We pledge to foster democracy and allow all the rights and liberties that will allow it to thrive. We recognise with gratitude, the smooth transition of leadership from the patriotic front government to our government. I thank my predecessor, His Excellency, Mr. Edgar Chagwa Lungu, for facilitating the transition. The African continent and world at large, hold Zambia in high esteem for the maturity of our democracy.

As Zambians, we should be proud. I commend the electorate who exercised their civic duty to vote for leaders of their choice in a peaceful manner. Special appreciation goes to the youth who turned out in large numbers to vote and bring about the change that they so much desired. I also commend all political parties and independent candidates for participating in the elections. Allow me to also extend my commendations to the electoral commission of Zambia for ensuring that the elections were held in a conducive environment, especially amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

I further commend the election observers, the church, traditional leaders and other stakeholders for the distinct roles they played during the elections.

Madam Speaker, now that the 2021 elections are behind us, it is time for us to unite as a nation and focus our energies on developing our country. It is time for all of us to work together and take Zambia forward. It is time to focus on addressing our common challenges as a people.

Theme of the Address

Madam Speaker,

The united party for national development government has a huge task ahead to turn around the economic fortunes of our country. Rebuilding our economy is top on our agenda, as this is what will deliver jobs, and better livelihoods for our people. We have indeed inherited an economy that is in dire straits and requires bold and decisive action to be taken to ensure recovery. We need the support of every citizen to achieve our development agenda. Our administration will, therefore, create an environment in which every citizen will have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from economic activities. As we begin our first term in office, our administration will embark on a national development agenda to ensure accelerated economic recovery.

Our vision is to have a united and prosperous Zambia that provides equal opportunities for all. We are determined to meet the basic needs of every Zambian and create a conducive environment for Zambia to become a prosperous middle-income country. We will implement policies to address the fiscal deficit while ensuring that confidence is restored in the markets. It is important to bring stability to our economy and accelerate growth. As we embark on this journey, it is cardinal that we equally enhance the provision of equitable access to economic opportunities to our citizens, especially our youth.

We will also enhance provision of adequate social services. Indeed, we will further enhance the provision of social protection to the poor and vulnerable in our society. It is in this regard that the theme of my address is "creating a united, prosperous and equitable Zambia: restoring economic growth and safeguarding livelihoods."

Madam Speaker,

The theme calls on all of us to unite regardless of our political affiliation, ethnicity, religion and gender. There is strength in unity. We need to focus on what unites us and not what divides us as a people. We are determined to usher in an era where politics are used to strengthen rather than weaken our unity. We are determined to make our national motto of "One Zambia, One nation" a reality and not just a mere slogan. We all desire a prosperous and equitable society.

The levels of poverty in our country are unacceptably high. We must end the vicious cycle of poverty and bring prosperity to all. We will work to reduce various forms of inequality and create a more equitable society. We will safeguard the livelihoods of the poor and vulnerable in our society. We will provide equal opportunities for development to all our citizens. Madam Speaker, the theme also reflects our desire to reverse the current economic downturn. We will accelerate economic growth and create opportunities for all. We will increase access to quality education and healthcare as well as water and sanitation services. In addition, we must sustain livelihoods, ensure affordable cost of living as well as food and nutrition security for our people.

National Development Agenda

Madam Speaker, the theme sets the tone and direction for our development agenda over the next five years. Our administration is determined to creating a united and prosperous Zambia with equal opportunities across ethnic, religious and gender considerations,

living in harmony in a free democratic society.

Madam Speaker,

Our administration will develop a robust national development action plan for the period 2022 to 2026. The 8th national development plan will reflect our economic transformation agenda to deliver on the national vision and the aspirations of our citizens. The focus of the transformation agenda will be on attaining outcomes beyond economic growth to include greater inclusion and poverty reduction.

Madam Speaker,

I will now proceed to outline the broad policy direction of my government for the next five years under the following thematic areas: economic transformation and job creation; human and social development; environmental sustainability; and good governance environment.

Economic Transformation and Job Creation

Madam Speaker,

Economic transformation will be the over-arching framework that will bring together interventions in the various sectors of the economy to create jobs and reduce poverty. To this end, government will implement policy measures to promote economic transformation, particularly in job rich sectors of agriculture, mining, tourism, energy, commerce and industry, green economy, transport as well as information and communication technology.

Our commitment to technological advancement in our country is evidenced by the proposed formation of the ministry of technology and science. Additionally, the proposed ministry of small and medium sized enterprise development is poised to foster the development, support and growth of small and medium sized enterprises.

Madam Speaker,

The agricultural sector is critical in driving growth, creating employment opportunities and contributing to prosperity of our country. Our country has in excess of 40 million hectares of arable land, abundant surface and underground water resources, favourable weather conditions, and readily available domestic, regional and international markets for our agricultural commodities.

Most of our people derive their livelihood from agriculture. The agricultural sector is, however, characterised by low productivity levels, insufficient agricultural support infrastructure, inadequate delivery of extension services and poor land husbandry practices. In addition, there is inadequate value addition, high cost of finance and high dependency on one crop, maize. Investing in this sector, therefore, guarantees significant improvements in the lives of the majority of our people.

To this end, government will implement a comprehensive agricultural transformation programme with the aim of making the sector a viable commercial undertaking. It is only through agricultural transformation that we will end hunger and improve nutrition while accelerating economic growth. This will ultimately make our country food secure and a breadbasket for the region.

Madam Speaker,

We will restructure the sector to focus on activities and interventions that raise production and productivity in crops, livestock and fisheries. We will create a conducive and stable environment, which is a critical pre-condition for agricultural transformation. To improve agricultural production and productivity, government will ensure access to affordable agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, chemicals and pesticides.

This will be achieved through the re-designing of the farmer input support programme to transform it into a more cost-effective and sustainable intervention. We will partner with the private sector and establish agro input manufacturing industries to produce these inputs for our farmers.

Madam Speaker,

Our administration will also promote crop diversification away from maize by supporting production of a wide range of cereal crops, legumes, fruit trees, roots and tubers, oil crops as well as fibre crops. To promote and increase livestock production, government will focus on stocking and restocking, artificial insemination as well as enhanced disease surveillance and control. Aquaculture is another area with great potential. We will promote the expansion and intensification of fish farming across the country, especially among women and youth.

Madam Speaker,

To ensure a transformed agricultural sector, government will review the existing agricultural policies. I therefore urge our people to seize the opportunities that exist in the sector so that, as a country, we are not only food sufficient but also become the breadbasket of the region and beyond.

Madam Speaker,

The mining sector will continue to play a key role in accelerating economic growth. Our administration is determined to ensure increased local participation and ownership in the sector, more jobs being created, as well as increased investments. We will ensure increased copper and other mineral production, as well as maximising the benefits from various minerals such as gold, cobalt, manganese among others. We want to position the country to be a leading manufacturer of mineral value-added products such as electrical cables and copper-based accessories.

To ensure predictable and sustained investment in the sector, government will review the mining tax policy framework. We will ensure that our people receive their fair share from our mineral wealth.

Madam Speaker,

Our government will prioritise tourism as one of the key sectors for restoring economic growth, creating jobs and reducing poverty. We will put in place a robust tourism marketing strategy and open up areas of great potential such as the northern circuit to enhance tourist flows. Energy is an important driving force for development. Our administration will ensure that the energy sector has an appropriate policy framework that will deliver affordable and clean energy from alternative renewable green economy sources. Our aim is to create excess capacity needed to effectively end load shedding with surplus power for export.

Our administration recognises that trade and industry plays a key role in economic development. We will pursue an export-led trade strategy that will focus on continuous improvement in the competitiveness and quality of our exports. Government will focus on micro, small and medium enterprises as the main engine for job and wealth creation. Transport is the backbone for facilitating economic activities, trade and development. Our administration will focus on balanced and integrated transport infrastructure development in road, railway and air transport. Government recognises the critical role that the digital and knowledge economy plays in enhancing productivity across all sectors. To harness this potential, we will mainstream digital revolution in our national programmes in order to tap into the talents and creativity of Zambians, especially the youth.

Human And Social Development

Madam Speaker,

Human and social development is essential to maintaining a healthy and skilled population. Improving access to education, health, social protection as well as water and sanitation services will be a pre-occupation of government in the next five years. Our administration considers education, science, and skills development as an equalizer. We will provide quality and equitable access to education for all.

The education curriculum will be reviewed to ensure that it is in line with the required artisan skills and our development aspirations and goals of the country. Our administration will also reform the higher education loan and bursary scheme to ensure that every deserving student is offered an opportunity to education, even when they may be from low financial status. Let me challenge our scientists, engineers, research institutions and universities to rise to the occasion and begin to explore possibilities of developing vaccines, medicines and appropriate technologies to respond to current and emerging issues. Investment in health is key to attaining a healthy and productive population.

Our administration will enhance healthcare financing to improve the quality of health service delivery. We will also secure the supply chain for medicines and medical supplies and undertake recruitment and deployment of skilled human resources for all health facilities across the country. Poverty levels among our people remain unacceptably high. Our administration will streamline the delivery of existing social protection programmes. A premium will also be placed on empowering our women and young people through empowerment and livelihood programmes. To reduce the socio-economic disparities among urban and rural regions, this administration will ensure that resources and opportunities are provided equitably across the country.

Our administration recognises that the water and sanitation sector is key. Government will accelerate the construction of dams, water schemes and boreholes to provide clean water and adequate sanitation services for households in both urban and rural areas.

Environmental Sustainability

Madam Speaker,

Our government is committed to fostering environmental sustainability and promoting the green economy. We have placed a premium on dealing with the serious threats posed by climate change. To address climate change, our government is committed to strengthening the institutional framework for implementing climate change interventions. Government will ensure that low carbon and climate resilient development pathways are pursued. We will safeguard our natural resources, which constitute our natural capital and a source of wealth. Our administration will embark on promoting the conservation of biodiversity, including ecosystems, to ensure our natural resource capital is not eroded. We shall make Zambia a global beacon for environmental sustainability and a champion of the green economy.

Good Governance

Madam Speaker,

A conducive governance environment is imperative for our country's political stability, security, economic growth and sustainable development. To achieve this, our administration will strengthen oversight and governance institutions, ensure the independence and autonomy of the judiciary, and guarantee a free press and an active civil society.

Our administration abhors corruption. We have a zero-tolerance policy on corruption in all its forms. We will wage war on corruption and there will be no sacred cows in the fight. We will introduce specialised fast-track stolen assets recovery mechanisms and courts for corruption and economic crimes.

Part of our progressive transformation agenda will include decentralisation and devolution of various central government functions to the provinces, districts and constituencies.

Our administration commits itself to immediately stop excessive public expenditure as a way of halting further accumulation of debt. We will engage our creditors on debt restructuring to restore sustainability. To improve productivity and service delivery, our administration will ensure that we have a dedicated and professional public service. We will de-politicise appointments and promotions and improve leadership and management competences. Our administration will enhance access to justice, ensure strict adherence to the rule of law and the upholding of human rights. Our administration will strengthen and preserve the integrity of the principle of separation of powers among the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, as provided for in our constitution.

Our democracy has become a shining example on the continent and the world at large. Our administration will implement electoral reforms to strengthen the independence of the electoral commission of Zambia and reform the public order act to facilitate its fair application. With respect to international cooperation and foreign relations, Zambia will effectively engage at bilateral, regional and international levels to maximise the benefits that accrue to the country. Government will pursue economic diplomacy. Adherence to national values and principles does not only promote patriotism, peace and unity among our people, but also creates a positive influence on work ethics and productivity. We will make the national motto of "One Zambia, One nation" a reality once again.

To begin to actualise the policy measures I have outlined, the minister of finance will soon be presenting the 2022 national budget to this August house. I therefore urge the honourable members to support the budget.

Conclusion

Madam Speaker,

On 12th August, 2021, our people sounded the trumpet of change. A trumpet summoning all of us to national duty. A duty to restore our economy and safeguard the livelihoods of our people. A duty to attain a truly united, equitable and prosperous country. A duty to stand for and uphold the rule of law. We must all act in harmony to move our country forward and achieve the much-needed economic transformation. Indeed, our best years as a nation are truly within our reach. Hard work, discipline and perseverance must be our bedrock.

Indeed, the classical Greek writer, Euripides, was right when he said and I quote, "*Much effort, much prosperity*", end of quote.

Madam Speaker,

We must put service above self and the interest of the country before our own interests. Let us take individual responsibility for the common good. We must promote peaceful co-existence and put an end to violence against each other. It is only in peace and unity that we can plan and actualise personal and national development.

Let the rivers and waters of peace and unity wash away all forms of violence from our land. This is what our founding father, Dr. Kenneth David Kaunda, overwhelmingly demonstrated. When we work to the best of our ability, our dreams become a reality. When we work together as a people, nothing can stop us from achieving our dreams. When we live a life of service to the nation, our legacy lives on. Let us emulate Dr. Kaunda and work hard to make Zambia a better place for all. Let us create a united, prosperous and equitable Zambia. The future of our country lies in our hands.

Madam Speaker,

It is now my singular honour and privilege to declare the first session of the thirteenth national assembly officially opened.

May God bless us all and continue to keep us safe.

May God bless the works of our hands.

May God bless our Christian nation, Zambia.

Madam Speaker,

I thank you.