

**STATEMENT MADE BY THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL GENDER ORGANISATIONS’  
COORDINATING COUNCIL (NGOCC) DURING A MEDIA BRIEFING FOLLOWING  
THE JUDGEMENT AND SENTENCING OF THE ABDUCTORS OF 13 YOUNG WOMEN,  
30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2023, HELD AT THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN WOMEN ASSOCIATION  
(YWCA), LUSAKA**

ON THURSDAY, 29<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2023, THE LUSAKA HIGH COURT JUDGE, JUSTICE CHARLES KAFUNDA SENTENCED JAMES MULENGA BWALYA AND MATHEWS SIKANGA TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT WITH HARD LABOUR FOR ABDUCTING AND SEXUALLY ABUSING 13 YOUNG WOMEN IN 2022. THIS WAS IN A MATTER IN WHICH THE DUO WERE BEING PROSECUTED FOR VARIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST THE 13 GIRLS WHICH INCLUDE ABDUCTION, RAPE, AGGRAVATED ROBBERY AND ASSAULT AMONG OTHERS. AS WAS WELL ESTABLISHED BY THE HIGH COURT, THE GIRLS SUFFERED PHYSICAL INJURY, EMOTIONAL STRESS, FINANCIAL LOSSES, LOSS OF CLOSE RELATIONS AND GENERAL LIFE ASPIRATIONS AMONG OTHER DAMAGE AS A RESULT OF THESE BARBARIC AND HEINOUS CRIMES.

THEREFORE, AS THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT WE WELCOME THE LIFE IMPRISONMENT OF THE TWO CONVICTS FOR THE HEINOUS CRIMES THEY COMMITTED. THE ULTIMATE LIFE SENTENCE OF THE TWO CRIMINALS IS VICTORY AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AS WELL AS JUSTICE FOR THE 13 YOUNG WOMEN WHO UNBELIEVABLY SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF THESE CRIMINALS. THE JUDGEMENT IS A STRONG MESSAGE BY OUR COURTS THAT PERPETRATORS OF SUCH CRIMES HAVE NO PLACE IN A CIVILIZED SOCIETY.

IT IS OUR SINCERE HOPE THAT THIS WILL SERVE AS A LESSON TO WOULD BE OFFENDERS. IT IS OUR HOPE THAT PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WILL LEARN THAT ABUSE DOES NOT PAY. OVER THE YEARS, THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HAVE BEEN CONCERNED WITH THE EVER-ESCALATING CASES OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN THE COUNTRY. WHILE THIS KIND OF VIOLENCE AFFECTS BOTH WOMEN AND MEN, GIRLS AND BOYS, IT IS A FACT THAT THESE INCIDENCES IMPACTS MORE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AS EVIDENCED BY THE STATISTICS RELEASED BY THE ZAMBIA POLICE VICTIM SUPPORT UNIT (VSU). THE CASE OF THE 13 YOUNG WOMEN EPITOMIZES THE ENGRAINED CHALLENGE THAT WE ARE FACED WITH AS A NATION WHEN IT COMES TO THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE. GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IS NOW A CRISIS! WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE BEING SEXUALLY PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY ABUSED IN ALL MANNER LIKE WE HAVE NEVER HEARD OF BEFORE. AS A RESULT OF THESE KINDS OF TORTURE WHICH HAPPEN RIGHT IN OUR COMMUNITIES, MORE AND MORE WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE LOSING THEIR LIVES AT THE HANDS OF SUCH PERPETRATORS. WOMEN ARE DYING IN SILENCE FROM THESE HEINOUS EVIL ACTS OF GBV. THE CASE ALSO EXACERBATES THE FACT THAT WOMEN ARE INCREASINGLY FALLING PREY TO MEN IN THEIR LIVES WHO ARE MEANT TO PROTECT THEM AT ALL COSTS AS WAS THE CASE WITH ONE OF THE GIRLS WHO WAS RELATED TO ONE OF THE CONVICTS.

THIS EPISODE ALSO EXPOSED THE WEAKNESSES IN THE SECURITY SYSTEMS OF OUR COUNTRY AND THE SAFETY OF THE GIRL CHILD. THE GIRL CHILD IS NO LONGER SAFE IN THEIR OWN HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE. THE GIRL

CHILD IS NO LONGER SAFE IN SCHOOL AND NOW THE GIRL CHILD IS NO LONGER SAFE IN THEIR WORKSPACE. CLEARLY A GIRL CHILD IS NOW AN ENDANGERED PERSON. FOR MONTHS ON END THESE TWO CRIMINALS KEPT ABDUCTING INNOCENT GIRLS.

AS WE CELEBRATE THIS MILESTONE ON THE LIFE IMPRISONMENT OF THE ABDUCTORS, WE WOULD LIKE TO REMIND THE STATE OF THEIR PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT AND SAFEGUARD THE LIVES OF ALL CITIZENS. THE STATE HAS A PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF ALL CITIZENS; WOMEN AND MEN, GIRLS AND BOYS EVERYWHERE. NEVER AGAIN SHOULD SUCH A SITUATION EVER HAPPEN IN OUR COUNTRY WHERE CRIMINALS CAN ABDUCT CITIZENS FOR MONTHS WITHOUT A TRACE. THE CONSTITUTION IS CLEAR IN TERMS OF THE STATE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT CITIZEN'S LIVES. AS HUMAN BEINGS WE ALL HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS TO LIFE.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HAS SINCE INSTRUCTED ITS LAWYERS TO IMMEDIATELY COMMENCE LEGAL ACTION AGAINST THE STATE TO DEMAND COMPENSATION FOR THE 13 GIRLS. THE STATE ABDICATED ON ITS RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THE GIRLS. WE DEMAND THAT THE STATE SHOULD IMMEDIATELY COMPENSATE THE 13 GIRLS AND THEIR FAMILIES FOR THE TRAUMA AND LOSSES THEY INCURRED DURING THIS WHOLE UNFORTUNATE OCCURENCE.

FURTHER, WE WOULD LIKE TO REITERATE OUR DEMAND THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD FULLY OPERATIONALIZE THE ANTI GBV ACT IN SO FAR AS THE BUILDING OF SHELTERS AND THE CREATION OF THE GBV FUND IS CONCERNED. IT IS THEREFORE OUR EXPECTATION THAT THE 2024 NATIONAL BUDGET WILL

ALLOCATE RESOURCES FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE OPERATIONALISATION OF THE ANTI GBV FUND AND OTHER RELATED PROVISIONS IN THE ACT.

WITH THIS SAID, THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK THE JUDICIARY FOR EXPEDITIOUSLY TAKING ON AND DISPOSING OFF THIS LANDMARK CASE. WE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE THE EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE GENDER DIVISION WHICH CONTINUE TO OFFER SUPPORT TO THE GIRLS IN VARIOUS WAYS. WHILST MORE CAN BE DONE, THE EFFORTS MADE THIS FAR CAN NOT GO UNRECOGNISED.

AS I CONCLUDE, MAY I TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENCOURAGE THE YOUNG WOMEN AND THEIR RESPECTIVE FAMILIES TO SOLDIER ON AND TAKE THIS EPISODE AS ONE OF THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE BUT CONTINUE TO HOPE FOR THE BEST AND PUT THIS EPISODE BEHIND THEM. MAY I ALSO CALL UPON MEMBERS OF THE ZAMBIAN SOCIETY TO UNITE AND END ANY FORMS OF GBV AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AND ANY VIOLENCE IN GENERAL.

**I THANK YOU!**