



NON-GOVERNMENTAL GENDER ORGANISATIONS' COORDINATING COUNCIL

"Building Solidarity For Women's Empowerment"

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THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL GENDER ORGANISATIONS' COORDINATING COUNCIL (NGOCC) REFLECTIONS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2023

1.0 PREAMBLE

The year 2023, like years before, offered a great opportunity for our Country Zambia to make significant strides towards a more inclusive and equal society by making efforts towards addressing some of the negative practices which have continued to perpetrate the marginalisation of women and girls.

While the nation witnessed a peaceful environment, the year was eventful in the governance space with a mix of highs and lows. The year 2023 has been peaceful with a return to a semblance of order in most aspects of our society among them the banning of cadres in bus stations and markets, curbing electoral violence to a larger extent and relocating street vendors to designated trading spaces. However, the failure to speedily find alternative trading places has created congestion along Kafue Road. During the year, the country witnessed some unjustified arrests and detentions of politicians in the opposition parties and denial of some freedoms such as freedom of assembly. On a positive note, the country also witnessed the outlawing of some statutes such as the abolishment of the death penalty, the removal of the defamation of the President clause and the enactment of the long-awaited Access to Information Law. As the cost of living continued to increase, poverty levels, especially among female headed Households increased, widening inequality and increasing poverty levels. Zambians have remained expectant of the New Dawn to deliver on many of its promises. We are however cognizant of the constrained economic environment given the debt crisis the country finds itself.

Therefore, as we say goodbye to 2023 and look forward to 2024, it is yet a time to reflect and pick up lessons. NGOCC makes these end of 2023 reflections as a National Umbrella organisation working to uplift the situation of women in Zambia. As a non-partisan, not for profit and non-governmental organization, our reflections are premised on our vision statement which is, **"A society where women fully participate and benefit from social, economic, political and cultural development."**

Below therefore are our reflections for 2023:

2.0 GENDER RESPONSIVE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

We wish to commend the government for enacting the Access to Information Act (ATI) after over two decades of being in the pipeline, largely due to lack of political will.

However, and worryingly so, the government's proposed piecemeal amendment to the Constitution smacks of the lack of political will to embark on a process that requires an agreed people driven road map.

The Constitutional review process that would also facilitate a stand-alone referendum to allow for the inclusion of the expanded Bill of Rights that will guarantee the social, cultural and economic rights of citizens that are critical to the realisation of women's empowerment. In the year 2023, the government yet again missed an opportunity to operationalize the Gender Equity and Equality Act by not establishing a Gender Commission which is constitutionally provided for. Furthermore, the government rendered a deaf ear to the numerous calls for the Ministry of Gender to be reinstated. We believe that the scrapping of the Ministry of Gender undermined the country's efforts towards narrowing the gender gap. Further, the abolishment of the Ministry undermines the gains made previously to embrace gender mainstreaming with a political mandate in order to narrow the gender gaps in all sectors of national development in conformity with regional and international best practices. We also appeal to the Government to operationalising the Gender Equity and Equality Commission which too, is a key component of the National Gender machinery. If the New Dawn Government is committed to women's empowerment and the gender agenda, it is our hope that they will ensure to undertake legal reforms and relook at the national gender machinery. We also acknowledge the cabinet approval of the revised Gender Policy and its 2023-2028 implementation plan. It is our hope that the policy will propel our advocacy on addressing gender inequality and specific vices such as Gender Based Violence (GBV).

In addition, the lackluster pace at which the reform of some important pieces of legislation has been moving is of grave concern. These include the Public Order Act (Proposed as the Public Gatherings Bill) and the Electoral Process Act. It is our considered view that these laws have a huge bearing on the governance record of the New Dawn Government in terms of how freedoms of assembly and association are managed, as well as curbing electoral violence which remains a huge hindrance to women's participation in politics at all levels. As the women's movement we are equally concerned about the stalled process of the repeal and replacement of the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Act. While the Government gave a nod for the repeal and replacement of the current NGO Act in February 2023, the law still remains on the statute books, further threatening the civic space. There is urgent need for the government to repeal and replace the NGO Act. It is our hope that the new dawn administration will prioritise these revisions in the 2024 legislative agenda.

3.0 INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE.

President Hakainde Hichilema pronounced himself quite clearly on the need for his government to uphold the rule of law and to be as inclusive as possible in all its dealings. Specifically, Article 259 of the Constitution which gives powers to the President to make appointments that include consideration of women, youth and persons with disabilities. However, his appointments largely did not do justice to the women and disabilities and the dire need for equal representation in decision-making positions. In Cabinet, for example, a female Minister was replaced by a male Minister, thereby reducing further the number of women from a paltry four to three. Hence the President did not make significant attempts to consider more women in Cabinet. This move, in our

view, represented a huge dent on the President's commitment to ensure 50:50 representation of women in key decision-making positions.

4.0 HIGH COST OF LIVING

As the women's movement we remain concerned about the cost of living which continues to perpetrate inequality. The cost of living has been worryingly very high and unbearable, especially for the women who are the majority of the poor in our Country. This has been exemplified by the cost of essential commodities key among them are mealie meal, other food items and fuel. On a positive note, we observed that the social protection mechanisms employed such as Food Security Packs (FSP), Social Cash Transfer (SCT), reinstatement of meal allowances in public Universities and School Feeding Programs, the Free Education Policy in Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary Schools as well as Bursaries for vulnerable learners in boarding secondary school and other empowerment initiatives like the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), remain active and functional. The irony with interventions such as these is that their effectiveness is swallowed up by the high cost of living. Furthermore, interventions such as the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP), good as the reforms have been in their management, are still marred by a lot of illegalities and irregularities which deprives the well-intended beneficiaries particularly the women. We however remain hopeful for continued implementation of all these initiatives while addressing operational challenges. Key among them is the reduction of commodity prices, especially on the staple food, through the government interventions during the 2023/2024 farming season.

5.0 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence remains the most prevalent and retrogressive human rights violation targeted at women and girls, with an increasing number of men and boys also being recorded as victims. Further, GBV has become more complex by the day with the increasing cases of online-based incidents gaining more prominence. We are also concerned with the continued abduction of girls as the case was of the reported girl that was abducted in Lusaka and dumped in Nakonde. We are further concerned about the many unreported cases of GBV. There is need for all stakeholders including the Government to promote the breaking of the culture of silence so that perpetrators face the law. A total of 31, 219 cases of various forms of Gender Based Violence were reported in the first three quarters of 2023. Of these cases 21, 936 are female and 6,735 are men. From these statistics it is clear that Gender Based Violence has become a national crisis. Because of the escalating gender-based violence in the country, a national wide campaign against GBV called Thursday in Black was launched on 2nd March 2023 for the purpose of creating awareness, prevention and ensuring that cases of GBV are reported. GBV has been one of the hinderances to women's developmental participation in the country. It is important that GBV is dealt with in our country as it has also caused death of precious lives. It is also a major factor that cause most of our girls to be out of school because of negative traditional practices such as early child marriages especially in rural areas. We call upon the government to invest in measures to respond and prevent gender-based violence, especially against women and girls. We further call on government to begin the review of the Anti-GBV Act to respond to the emerging threats that GBV poses and expedite the building of GBV shelters for the survivors and the establishment of the GBV fund. We call upon the country to be united and fight Gender Based Violence in all its forms. GBV is a

hinderance to women's economic and political participation. The women's movement was pleased with the landmark judgement of the 13 girls that were abducted and should be an example of GBV cases in our courts of law for sentencing perpetrators. However, as we reflect on this, we are of the view that the girls needed to be compensated for the trauma and the time they spent away from their normal lives.

6.0 NATIONAL UNITY

We reiterate our call for national unity in the spirit of One Zambia, One Nation and One People. The peace Zambia has enjoyed over the years has been largely because of responsible leaders and politicians alike, who put the Country's unity before any amount of self interest in the name of politics. Zambia has continued to exist and thrive under the mantra of 'One Zambia, One Nation' as an independent and sovereign country. Further, it is a fact that any kind of disunity, tension and any manner of confusion would cause unimaginable destruction to our Country including affecting the most vulnerable in our society such as women and children.

We therefore call on the Government to provide leadership and put in place a programme to educate and inculcate patriotism and oneness beyond tribe and region.

7.0 CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY

Zambia is a multi-party state and therefore, Political Parties are key to a thriving democracy. We are deeply concerned with the happenings in the former ruling party. We urge the leadership of the former ruling party to resolve their differences as the party is key to the democracy of the country.

As stated, strong political parties and especially strong opposition, remain key to the growth and nurturing of our young democracy as a country.

8.0 CONCLUSION

As the mandate of the New Dawn government enters its third year, we would like to urge them to remain focused on delivering to the expectations of the people whom they swore to serve. While they have scored some progressive points for the country on some fronts, our Country remains one of the most unequal on the globe. Women and girls remain marginalized. The government should focus on practically improving the livelihood of its people without leaving anyone behind especially the women. This should be seen in fair and equal appointments to decision-making positions, a practical fight against graft, short and long-term economic interventions that aim at cushioning the burden on the poor, a deliberate and non-selective fight against traction in the legal reforms including the constitutional review process and a visible and practical fight against GBV.

As we reflect on 2023 as women of this country, we are concerned with the moral degradation in our society. It is our considered view that most of the violence and immoral behaviours we are witnessing and experiencing is coming from the way the children are being brought up in homes. We therefore appeal to parents and guardians to bring up our children with good values that will make them grow into responsible citizens that will contribute positively to the development of our country. We are aware that our children are the future and so we need to prepare them from our homes, we should always remember that charity begins at home. We therefore commend the

government on the policy to reunite couples, as raising children requires concerted parenting especially at teenage levels.

Finally, the government needs to improve the gender machinery by bringing back the Ministry of Gender as a matter of urgency and establishing the Gender Equity and Equality Commission.

I THANK YOU



GRACE MANYONGA SINKAMBA