

TUESDAY, 21 MARCH, 2017

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
BY THE
HON. MINISTER OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL GUIDANCE, REV.
SUMAILI,
ON THE
MUSHROOMING OF FALSE CHURCHES AND PROPHETS, AND MEASURES
BEING PUT IN PLACE**

Mr Speaker, I thank you most sincerely for giving me this opportunity to make a statement to this august House, and through this House, inform the nation on the steps the Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Guidance has taken in curbing the mushrooming of false churches and prophets.

Sir, let me begin by stating that, as a country, we have publicly acknowledged the supremacy of God Almighty over the nation's affairs. We have further declared Zambia as a Christian nation while upholding a person's right to freedom of conscience, belief or religion.

Mr Speaker, before I proceed, allow me to remind this august House the mandate of my ministry. On 28th August, 2016, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zambia, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, announced the creation of the new Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Guidance and was consequently ratified by Parliament on 27th October, 2016. The mandate of the ministry is to actualise and translate the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation into practical, workable and realistic interventions. Therefore, my ministry will provide overall policy and legal framework in all matters pertaining to Zambia as a Christian heritage.

Further, the mandate is to facilitate the mainstreaming of the national, biblical and cultural values and principles in our day to day life and the country's programmes. The portfolio functions were published in the Government Gazette dated 7th December, 2016, and are stated as follows:

- (a) Christian affairs;

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- (b) interdenominational dialogue;
- (c) national guidance;
- (d) national values, principles and ethics;
- (e) public religious celebrations;
- (f) preservation of Christian and religious sites; and
- (g) religious affairs.

Mr Speaker, the address by His Excellency the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Zambia, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, on the progress made in the application of national values and principles on Friday, 17th March, 2017, gives a clear direction to my ministry. In line with the mandate, my ministry is working directly with the churches and religious groups.

Mr Speaker, it would be an omission on my part if I do not acknowledge the great contribution of the Church in national development. The churches are involved in spiritual transformation through their preaching and outreach activities and have invested in education, health, agriculture, skills training and entrepreneurship development, governance, environmental and climate change programmes, gender and child protection activism among many things. In health, they are involved in running hospitals and clinics, implementing Tuberculosis (TB) treatment programmes and malaria and Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) prevention and care programmes for the chronically ill patients. They care for orphans and vulnerable children and provide support for livelihoods and nutrition. They have invested in schools aimed at promoting holistic development in our country. In addition, they have built colleges and universities thereby strengthening tertiary education for the growing population. This contributes to poverty eradication and hence uplifts the living standards of our people.

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Mr Speaker, the church has been experiencing tremendous growth, both numerically and spiritually. This growth is a positive phenomenon because growth and increase is the will of God. One wise man said, “The Lord is our Judge, he is our law giver. The Lord is our king.” His influence is in all the three arms of Government.

Mr Speaker, I wish to state, however, that in spite of the great strides being made by the church, with many faithful men and women of the collar, serving the Lord in our country, there are some challenges that have been experienced. We have seen the proliferation of churches, which are exploiting the favourable environment of religious freedom and instead engaging in strange practices which put some of our people at risk. These strange practices include the use of water, which has become a ritual, power or strength is obtained by sleeping with a virgin. Too much emphasis on material wealth, emphasis on acts or miracles rather than the word of God, which is the truth, false and misleading messages, for example stopping HIV/AIDS patients from taking their medication.

Mr Speaker, many of such churches do not even affiliate to a church mother body for accountability or supervision. Some churches have opted to register under the Patents and Companies Registration Authority (PACRA) as a company. In view of this practice, my ministry is working with PACRA and the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry to make it mandatory, through a legal instrument for churches to register under the Registrar of Societies. This will make them more accountable unlike when they are running their churches as companies.

Sir, in the interim, my ministry has put in place administrative measures whereby PACRA will not register a church or faith based organisation without clearance from my ministry.

Mr Speaker, in addition, I wish to inform the nation, through the august House that my ministry is also working closely with the church and religious umbrella bodies that are currently registered with the Registrar of Societies to ensure effective oversight and compliance of their member churches.

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Mr Speaker, some of the administrative provisions put in place for the registration of churches and faith-based organisations are as follows:

- (a) first and foremost, the registration of churches and faith-based organisations will remain with the Ministry of Home Affairs under the Department of the Registrar of Societies as provided for under Chapter 119 of the Laws of Zambia of the Societies Act;
- (b) the new applications will start the process with the Registrar of Societies who will conduct preliminary assessments as follows:
 - (i) they will ascertain the authenticity of the identities of the applicants;
 - (ii) they will conduct security clearance; and
 - (iii) they will obtain documentation such as the constitution and recommendation letter from a recognised church mother body to which they may be aligned.
- (c) the Registrar of Societies will submit the file to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Guidance who will:
 - (i) conduct further scrutiny and screening; and
 - (ii) give feedback to the Registrar of Societies within a given timeframe to register or not to.

Sir, my ministry will also extend the scrutiny of churches to foreign missionaries who come to Zambia for short or long term missionary activities. We have agreed, with the Ministry of Home

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Affairs on the need to collaborate and be extremely thorough in handling applications for permits and visas in order to keep away fake people who may wish to abuse the freedom of religion and the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation for their clandestine activities. Similarly, the Department of Immigration will pass on the file of the applicant obtaining required documents to my ministry who will further screen the applicant and give feedback to the Immigration Department.

Mr Speaker, in order to strengthen the operations of the churches and faith based organisations in Zambia, my ministry is already working with the Ministry of Justice and will bring various instruments before Parliament aimed at enhancing accountability and the integrity of people of the collar and their churches and organisations.

Sir, in conclusion, my ministry intends to bring the church and faith-based organisations to a level of strength, evidencing the traits of maturity, integrity, order and good governance. My ministry, in line with the mandate, will work with the church to give guidance and promote national unity, good morals, social justice, integrity, patriotism and other values and principles within a Christian framework in the nation. The values and principles, as you are aware, are enshrined under Part II Article 8 and 9 of the *Zambian Constitution*.

Mr Speaker, finally, my ministry wishes to emphasise the need and importance of dialogue and collaboration between the state and the church in the manner we conduct our business towards actualising Zambia as a Christian nation and promote national values and principles.

I thank you, Sir.