

FRIDAY, 16 JUNE, 2017

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON THE

PERFORMANCE OF THE UNDER-20 ZAMBIA NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM, AT
2017 FIFA UNDER-20 WORLD CUP TOURNAMENT

BY THE

HON. MINISTER OF YOUTH, SPORT AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT, MR MAWERE

Mr Speaker, I thank you most sincerely for giving me this opportunity to make a ministerial statement to this august House and, through this House, inform the nation on the performance of the Under-20 Zambia National Football Team, at the just ended 2017' the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Under-20 World Cup Tournament, held in Korea, from 20th May to 11th June, 2017.

Mr Speaker, Under-20 World Cup is the second largest global football tournament organised by FIFA. It is held every four years, preceding the senior World Cup Tournament. Twenty-four countries, including the host country, the Republic of Korea, qualified and competed in the World Cup Tournament.

Mr Speaker, it is worth noting that the Under-20 National Team, in 2016, participated in the COSAFA Men's Cup which was held in South Africa where the team was crowned COSAFA champions after beating South Africa.

Further, the Under 20 National Team participated in the 2017 Under-20 Africa Cup of Nations, hosted by Zambia from 26th February to 12th March, 2017, during which they won all their matches up to the finals, where they were crowned African champions.

Sir, four teams, namely; Guinea Bissau, South Africa, Senegal and Zambia that reached the semi-finals during the AFCON competition in Zambia automatically qualified to the 2017 FIFA Under-20 World Cup held in Korea.

Mr Speaker, our gallant Under-20 National Football Team put up a spirited fight in Korea and emerged among the top eight in the world.

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During their tour of duty, our team participated in five matches, that is, from group stage up to quarter finals. At group stage, Zambia was grouped in Group C, with Portugal, the former defending champions, Costa Rica and Iran. On 21st May, 2017, Zambia played Portugal and won 2 goals to 1. On 24th May, 2017, Zambia played against Iran whom they beat 4 goals to 2. The final game, which I may call as a formality game, was against Costa Rica, where we lost 1 goal to 0. With this performance, Zambia was leading the group with six points followed by Portugal with four. Zambia, therefore, qualified to the Round of 16. During the Round of 16, Zambia was pegged with Germany. The match took place in Jeju on 31st May, 2017. Zambia beat Germany 4 goals to 3 in extra time, thereby qualifying to the quarter finals.

After the Quarter Finals, Zambia was pegged with Italy and the match took place on 5th June, 2017, which saw Zambia losing by 3 goals to 3. This was after a gallant performance by our young men in extra time.

Mr Speaker, it is worth noting that it was the first time the Zambia Under-20 National Team reached the quarter finals in the Under-20 FIFA World Cup Competition. The outstanding performance of the Under-20 National Football Team was a result of well co-ordinated talent identification during community sports activities and school sports, which was fully harnessed and given the right exposure. The assembled team was exposed to regional, continental and international competitions before they played in the Under-20 World Cup.

The team received financial and material support from both the Government and private sector. The Government facilitated for the team training camp in Spain before competing in both the Under-20 African Cup of Nations (AFCON) and Under-20 World Cup.

Mr Speaker, the development and facilitation for the Under-20 team to be able to compete favourably in the just ended Under-20 World Cup was not without challenges. You may wish to note that it takes eight years to develop an athlete to an elite level, which our gallant Under-20 Zambia National Football Team has attained.

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Mr Speaker, assembling and keeping the Under-20 National Football Team for about four years has not been easy. Of course, there have been challenges and these, among others, include the following:

- (a) inadequate finances to procure sports equipment and continuously undertaking talent identification and developmental activities across the nation;
- (b) inadequate investment by the private sector in sports development. Of course, allow me to put it on record that we appreciate what Airtel Zambia did under the Airtel Rising Stars National Talent Identification Programme, which has equally contributed to our better performance during all these tournaments;
- (c) inadequate football academies which offer professional football training sessions and develop technical abilities to young players through specialised football development so that talent can be properly harnessed; and
- (d) inadequate qualified high performance football coaches that can offer professional football training sessions.

Mr Speaker, in view of the identified challenges, there is need for concerted effort from all the stakeholders, as so far much of the funds are coming from the Government.

Mr Speaker, moving forward, the Government through my ministry under the hardworking leadership of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zambia, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, will continue providing policies that are aimed at bringing about development through sports, especially among our majority youth. The Government will continue working with the private sector to enhance increased investment in sport. Investment in infrastructure such as the construction of ultra modern stadia like Levy Mwanawasa and National Heroes will be highly encouraged to attract more young people to play football and other sports at professional levels.

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Mr Speaker, in order to increase the pool of talented youth to represent the country at different international sports competitions, other interventions are being undertaken by my ministry and other partners and these include the following:

Podium Performance Programme (PPP)

The programme is designed to nurture highly talented athletes to reap medals at regional, continental and world competitions. In this regard, there is need for adequate funding for development of football teams under this programme.

Establishment of a Centre of Excellence

The centre of excellence for a specialised football academy and other sports has been established at the Olympic Youth Development Centre (OYDC) which will require to be fully equipped in order to develop an athlete in a holistic manner, in terms of sports science, strength and conditioning and sport nutrition.

Sport Education and Accreditation Systems (SEAS)

This is a platform which has been developed to harmonise coaches' qualifications including those in football in order to upgrade them from the minimum Confederation of African Football (CAF) Licence C to the highest CAF Pro-licence approved by world sports federations such as FIFA and International Amateur Athletes Federation (IAAF). These qualifications will enable coaches to train young talents to professional levels.

Review of the National Sports Act and National Sports Policy

This is an important undertaking that will help to bring the two documents in tandem with world sports development trends. The review would also take into consideration emerging issues such as sport incentives.

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Infrastructure Development

This is one of the core programmes which my ministry is implementing to enhance mass participation and talent identification. The programme involves construction and rehabilitation of stadia, sports complexes at national, provincial and district levels. Adequate facilities will increase the number of football teams in all age categories from which talent can be tapped for all national teams.

Grassroot Sport

This is a programme my ministry has developed aimed at boosting citizenry mass participation in sports including football in the communities in order to encourage healthy lifestyles and identify talent at an early stage. This talent can be nurtured from specialised football academies within communities.

Mr Speaker, as I conclude, I would like to say that with increased financial investments in these interventions, the Government through my ministry will continue improving the performance of players at regional, continental and world competitions to bring glory to mother Zambia and subsequently qualify for the World Cup.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.