

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON
THE UPDATE ON PROGRAMME TO END CHILD-MARRIAGE
AND CURRENT STATE OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
BY THE
HON. MINISTER OF GENDER, MS KALIMA

Mr Speaker, it is with gratitude that I present a ministerial statement on this first day of the Third Meeting of the First Session of the Twelfth National Assembly in an effort to keep the citizens informed on topical issues that concern them. My statement today addresses two pertinent issues, namely; an update on the programme to end child-marriage and the current state of gender-based violence in the country.

Mr Speaker, child-marriage is defined as a union between male and female persons with either one or both being below the age of eighteen years. Globally, child-marriage has been identified as one of the detriments to development and to the realisation of human rights, especially children's rights. It is considered one form of gender-based violence and Zambia has not been spared. Available statistics indicate that an estimated 31 per cent of women, aged twenty to twenty-four years, marry before their eighteenth birthday whilst 45 per cent of women aged twenty-five to forty-nine years, who are a generation older, report being married before the age of eighteen.

The above statistics imply that there is an inter-generational decrease in the number of women getting married before the age of eighteen. In comparison, the marriage rate for males between twenty and twenty-four years, stands at 5.9 per cent. As for males aged between twenty-nine and forty-nine years, the rate is at 9.6 per cent. These statistics, especially for the women in the twenty-nine to forty-nine age group, are the highest in the African region.

According to a study conducted by Population Council in 2016, the prevalence rate of child-marriage is as follows:

<i>District</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>Rate (%)</i>
Chama	Muchinga	44
Mpulungu	Northern	43.5
Chiluba	Luapula	40
Lundazi	Eastern	39.8
Katete	Eastern	39
Mbala	Northern	38.2
Kaputa	Northern	38.1
Nyimba	Eastern	37.8
Mungwi	Northern	36.9
Mafinga	Northern	35.3
Petauke	Eastern	35.2
Lufwanyama	Copperbelt	34.9
Chinsali	Northern	34.4
Luwingu	Northern	33.8
Samfya	Luapula	33.7

Mr Speaker, the prevalence rate for boys and girls, is at 1 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively. As a result of child-marriage, girls continue to die from childbirth complications and both girls and boys continue to drop out of the school system, thereby reducing their chances of escaping the poverty trap.

A study conducted in Zambia attributed child-marriage to poverty; limited access to information and services; few opportunities for leisure and recreation, skills development and employment; prohibitive cost of sending children to secondary school; marriage as a response to teenage pregnancy; inadequate care for orphans and stepchildren; lack of a risk management strategy for difficult or hard-to-manage children; and inadequate child supervision or social support.

To this end, I am glad to report that the Patriotic Front (PF) Government, through my ministry, has put in place a National Strategy and its Plan of Action on Ending Child Marriage 2016 – 2021, which is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The strategy aims at eliminating harmful practices such as child and forced marriages. Further, the strategy aims at providing a clear policy, legal strategic and operational framework for co-ordination and national mobilisation and service delivery that will accelerate the nation's effort of zero-tolerance to child-marriage. The national strategy and its plan of action are being implemented by a consortium of eleven ministries to tackle all negative aspects of child-marriage.

Mr Speaker, allow me to inform this House that the Government has developed the Marriage and Child Code Bills in a bid to effectively address child-marriage in the country, among other measures. The Bills, which will be tabled before Parliament soon, will also help address the challenge arising from dual marriage laws, namely; customary and statutory. The Child Code Bill will particularly help to address the definition of a child. This is because a child is defined differently in different circles, including at the instances of obtaining national documents such as the green national registration card (NRC), driving licence, voter's card and so on.

Mr Speaker, a number of programmes are being implemented or co-ordinated by my ministry. One of these programmes is the Government of the Republic of Zambia - United Nations (GRZ-UN) joint programme on gender-based violence and the Girls Education and Women's Livelihood (GEWEL) project aimed at keeping girls in school, with a view of keeping them away from the negative vices which come with early marriages. One other programme we intend to implement with our co-operating partners in Luapula and Northern Provinces is at pilot level.

Mr Speaker, with this opportunity, the campaign, especially in the area of ending child marriages, has support from almost all stakeholders. Chiefs or traditional leaders, civil society organisations (CSOs) and co-operating partners have brought forth the vision to end this vice, into Government. This multi-sectoral approach has led to decreased rates of child marriage and has earned His Excellency, President Edgar Chagwa Lungu, a title of champion in ending child marriages under the African Union (AU).

Sir, as a country, we have begun to focus on lobbying and mobilising resources to construct extra physical boarding facilities in rural areas, especially, for girls. It is a fact that education goes a long way in facilitating the self actualisation of one's potential. For the female gender, it is actually leads to having families with raised standards of living. At a risk of sounding like a broken record to repeat the old adage that, "When you educate a woman, you educate a nation," let us all join the fight to eradicate child marriages.

Mr Speaker, let me turn to the other issue of gender based violence (GBV). From the time I gave the statement on this subject on 28th March, 2017, the overall scenario on GBV against women has not changed. However, there are unprecedented dimensions of GBV, which the country has witnessed in the recent past such as women perpetuating violence against men, in some cases, resulting in fatalities including death. GBV committed by women against men has received a lot of media attention through publications, social media and radio discussions. This is because it is not commonly accepted, culturally or religiously, that women should be found engaging in such vices. Generally, society at large finds these acts as unacceptable in that they destabilise and lead to deprivation but in most cases, they lead to loss of the sole bread winner, not only for nuclear, but for extended families too. However, despite this new phenomenon of women committing GBV against men, reports continue to show that women are the majority of victims of GBV, which is usually perpetuated by male counterparts.

Sir, as at May, 2017, reports from the Victims support Unit (VSU) under the Zambia Police Service indicate that 5,464 GBV were reported in the quarter of 2017, representing an increase of 466 cases over the same period in 2016. Out of the total number of cases reported in 2017, 627 were child defilement cases of which all the victims were girls compared to 701 cases in the first quarter of 2016. This shows the decrease of seventy-four cases representing 10.5 per cent reduction over the over the same period in 2016. This reduction could be attributed to the laws, structures and sensitisation campaigns put in place by the Patriotic Front (PF) Government.

Sir, in terms of provincial differentials, Lusaka Province recorded the highest number with 330 cases followed by Central Province with seventy-one cases whilst Eastern Province was the third with fifty-six cases. Furthermore, Southern Province had forty-seven cases, Copperbelt had

thirty-three cases, Muchinga Province had twenty-five cases while both Luapula and North Western provinces recorded a total of eighteen cases each. Northern Province had a total of thirteen cases with Western Province recording the least of ten cases. In addition to these reported cases, a total number of twenty-four gender-based related murder cases were recorded out of which nine victims were adult females, three male adults, six were girls and another six were boys. From these figures, it is sad to note that our society has continued to violate the rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled regardless of their gender.

Mr Speaker, the issue of GBV is a vice which is, generally, considered of being private and secretive. It is at the same time regarded as a shameful social cultural act for a family or any person. The defilement dimension of GBV is further regarded as taboo by society. As a result, most cases go unreported. My ministry may start considering collecting data on these cases by engaging communities to share on how many cases they have witnessed, heard of or experienced without reporting to Zambia Police, CSOs like the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) or community paralegals. In this way, we may measure or approximate the extent and magnitude of the vice in our communities which will lead to further development of practical targeted interventions.

Sir, the fight against GBV requires consented efforts from all the like-minded stakeholders in order to provide a holistic approach to ending the vice. To this end, I am happy to report that the Government has continued to work with various stakeholders to come up with practical interventions aimed at reducing the incidences of GBV. In particular, the Government through my ministry has been working with our co-operating partners (CPs) such as the World Bank (WB), United Nations Family, European Union (EU), Department for International Development (DFID), Swedish and Iris Aid. Further, collaboration with the African Union (AU) has created a new profile for Zambia and also opened avenues for more funding.

Mr Speaker, allow me to conclude by reminding each one of us that a healthy society requires a health relationship between family members, between friends and generally between one another. Let us ensure to communicate with one another in a manner that does not lead to any form of violent attacks against each other.

I thank you, Mr Speaker.