

THURSDAY, 5 JULY, 2018

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON THE

ELECTRONIC AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

BY THE HON. MINISTER OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION, MR

MUSHIMBA, MP

Madam Speaker, I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude for according me this opportunity to deliver a ministerial statement on the use of electronic platforms (e-platforms) for commerce, collaboration and interaction particularly social and electronic media platforms in Zambia.

Madam Speaker, Zambia is part of the global community where the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is growing and impacting on the commercial and social fabric of communities. The availability and penetration of e-platforms for business and social interactions has to a great extent, changed and continues to do so, our social attitudes, community values between individuals and also changing our workplaces and workplace interactions. Social and electronic media platforms also continue to provide opportunities for all our citizens, increasing access to services and providing for instant collaboration with various stakeholders. However, the social media platforms, like all media platforms, have both positive and negative aspects that can be attributed to individuals and organisations.

Madam Speaker, the Patriotic Front (PF) Government under the leadership of His Excellency, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu is fully cognisant that Zambians have the constitutional freedom to hold, receive, or disseminate their views be it in support or contrary through social and electronic media platforms of their choice on any subject of public interest including the country's governance and politics in a responsible manner. Some of these platforms include websites and mobile applications that allow our people to share content quickly, efficiently and in real time.

Madam Speaker, to buttress the point on how impactful ICTs have become, allow me to share some statistics in the sector. As at the end of 2017, the total number of mobile telephone

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subscribers stood at almost 14 million, representing a penetration rate of 82 per cent. This represented a 12 per cent growth from the previous year. The sector has also been recording a significant increase in the usage of mobile internet with 8 million active internet users in the first quarter of 2018 representing a 47 per cent internet penetration and a 16 per cent growth from the year for the same period. The mobile internet usage has been boosted with the increased investment in the telecoms infrastructure by both the Government and private sector. In addition, a national ICT household survey conducted by the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA) in 2015 found that about 65 per cent of households in the country have access to mobile phones determined by at least one member of the household owning a mobile phone. Further, about 51 per cent of the people aged ten and above in Zambia are active users of mobile phones. It was further found that about 14 per cent of these individuals have smart phones and that about 71 per cent of the smart phone use owners use the devices to access Over-The-Top (OTT) applications such as Whatsapp, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Viber, Skype and Twitter.

Madam Speaker, that number of Zambians with smart phones is accounting for the over 2 million people in our country who are active on social media platforms today. As the ministry responsible for communications, we wish to see this number grow as it encourages connectedness, social and commercial interactions and allows innovative individuals and businesses to thrive with increased access to their customer base at affordable rates. This is the desire of the Government. The investment into the sector I have spoken about both from the Government and from the private sector is a resounding testament that the intention of the Government is to encourage the uptake of thee-platforms to aggressively support the digital transformation that brings more efficiency in serving citizens, that allows innovation to take foothold and cultivate new interest and generate solutions to our challenges to the digital platforms. We want as many Zambians as possible to embrace the digital transformation to get onto social media and e-platforms, and for them to use these platforms productively.

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Madam Speaker, sadly, we have taken note that some consumers within the Zambian ICT ecosystem are showing a lack of social media and digital etiquette and are using the advancements in information technology to harm others. I want to emphasise that this is a very small group of people and as Government, we do not want this group or we will not allow this group to grow. Many people are utilising e-platforms and social media networks productively such as to catch up with friends, endorse or market their businesses or access valid news faster. However, this small group is notoriously using the platforms to steal identities, spread false news or fake news, cyber buying, transmit pornographic images, perpetrate hate speech and plainly abuse other consumers online. Avid users of ICTs who include our children and young adults have become primarily vulnerable to such vices. As citizens, as leaders, this, we must not stand by and watch, or allow it to continue and pollute our young ones. We have a duty to defend the defenceless.

Madam Speaker, furthermore, we have observed that increasingly, social media in Zambia has become a catalyst for the detachment of members of the Zambian society from our cultural norms. Prior to the proliferation of social media, people in Zambia behaved and communicated within acceptable and expected cultural boundaries. Zambian children were respectful and everyone played a role in promoting social rules and social cohesion. Unfortunately, the emerging Zambian digital culture is foreign and places the nation's cultural, social and economic well being at risk.

Madam Speaker, I have spoken about the incidents of impersonations from a small group of people. They are insulting everyone on social media and other platforms. They are also falsely accusing and or defrauding people on social media platforms. This has reached a level of concern by the Government. Most users of the internet in Zambia can testify to the offensive or inciting nature of some messages or some digital content found in our digital eco-system. Many of you hon. Members and Ministers just like other law abiding citizens are present victims of criminal elements on the e-platforms and social media. Many of you have fake online footprints created by these individuals with intention to dupe people and steal their hard-earned money purporting to be you. Many of you are subjects of false reports and news items online bent on nothing but to tarnish your good names and spoil your good images.

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Madam Speaker, the desire of Government is to see that the use of social media and other electronic platforms remain consistent with our national values. The levels of cyber crime and the improper use of social media are growing and may soon reach epidemic levels, the consequences which could be socially, culturally and economically damaging, if not adequately addressed. As the internet use expands and develops, many dangers are developing right along with it. These dangers that I have spoken about such as cyber bullying, unsolicited contact, insults, aggressive behaviour, pointed abuse and pornography among others cannot and should not be allowed to become the norm. As earlier alluded to, these dangers place a tremendous risk on the moral and economic fibre of the Zambian society and it must be fought.

Madam Speaker, the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA) in collaboration with the Zambia Police Service has, in the recent past, recorded an upswing in the number of cases known as affinity fraud cases. These are cases in which unsuspecting members of the public are duped into believing that they are communicating with someone in a position of authority or a politician on Facebook, such as a minister and they are being offered assistance in getting employment, loans, contracts or scholarships. To date, a total of thirty four cases have been flagged with over 627 victims. Over K600,000 has been stolen from victims with the majority of the money being sent outside the country through commercial banks.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that a lot of unsuspecting members of the public are falling prey to these scammers using social media platforms such as Facebook. The scammers are stealing small amounts of money from a large number of people and when added up, these amounts are becoming significant. The scammers are taking advantage of the gullibility of many members of the public who are experiencing the internet and social media and electronic platforms (e-platforms) for the first time.

Madam Speaker, the Government is highly, and rightfully so, concerned with these illegal and harmful activities in cyber space and will endeavour to put in place measures and interventions

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that cut across the breadth and depth of the sector to address behavioural and technical matters that are negatively impacting the Zambian digital culture and digital transformation.

Madam Speaker, among the interventions by the Government, to foster national economic growth by promoting a safe and secure ICT sector in Zambia are:

- (a) Development and Implementation of the Child Online Protection (COP) Strategy. The COP Strategy is being developed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications. The COP Strategy will provide for an appropriate social, technical, legal and capacity building framework to address online risks against children and young adults. The Strategy will build collaborative synergies among key national, regional and international stakeholders to create an enabling environment for child welfare and development in the digital age;
- (b) Development of Appropriate Legislation. My ministry is proposing to enact three pieces of legislation which include the Cyber Security and Cyber Crime Act, the Data Protection Act and the Electronic Transactions and Electronic Commerce Bill that will promote responsible use of digital platforms and safeguard users of these platforms that include social media from unscrupulous users that mean to harm them; and
- (c) Capacity Building for Law Enforcement Agencies. We are of the view that an important mitigation measure of cyber security and abuse is through the enhancement of technical capacity building in our law enforcement agencies and the judicial systems. This Government is addressing that.

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Madam Speaker, as I conclude, I wish to reiterate that the same way we have laws in the physical space, where we have existed since time immemorial, laws that define, guide and create boundaries of acceptability in terms of our interactions as human beings with clear consequences if one goes beyond acceptable limits, this must also apply to the new cyber world we have now entered. It is the Government's intention that the measures being taken, including the proposed enactment of the ICT Bills will ensure the safeguarding of Zambia's cyber space for everyone and promote the responsible use of electronic platforms for improved economic performance for our country. The enforcement of these Bills will lower online risks. Those that have been engaging in these unsavoury behaviours online must get worried and scared because the Government will not sit back and watch them ravage and with impunity, take advantage of our people, especially our unsuspecting children. I urge parliamentarians and the nation at large, to support these interventions by the Government because they are well meaning.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.