

WEDNESDAY, 21 FEBRUARY, 2018

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

SALE OF NRDC

The Minister of Agriculture (Mr Katambo)

Mr Speaker, thank you for giving me this opportunity to deliver a statement on the alleged sale of the Natural Resources Development College (NRDC). This statement has been necessitated by the need to inform the House and the nation at large on the state of the college.

Sir, the Patriotic Front (PF) Government has prioritised agriculture as a number one sector to spearhead the country's economic growth agenda. To this effect, the country requires well qualified manpower to impart modern agricultural skills to our farmers in order to raise agriculture productivity and production. NRDC offers nine diploma courses in the field of agriculture and related subjects. The college is affiliated to the University of Zambia (UNZA), which provides quality assurance. It is also linked to the Health Professional Council of Zambia (HPCZ) because it offers a food and nutritional course. Further, the college is regulated by the Teaching Council of Zambia as an educational college specialising in agriculture.

Mr Speaker, recently, there has been an outcry from some members of the public who have been alleging that the Government has sold NRDC which falls under the Ministry of Agriculture. The Government has not sold NRDC.

Mr Speaker, on 31st January, 2018, the then Chief Government spokesperson issued a statement on this matter, and I would like to echo what she said at that time. NRDC was built in 1965 to cater for a student population of 300. The student population has since increased to 2,024, and it is projected that the college student population will hit 4,000 by 2019. It is obvious that the current infrastructure cannot cope with such an anticipated high number of students. The college can only accommodate not more than 650 students who will have to share rooms while the rest of the students either come from their homes or rent boarding houses around the college.

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Sir, the college also shares infrastructure facilities which are the office and classroom blocks and hostels with the In-Service Training Trust. This further exerts pressure on college facilities.

Mr Speaker, the college infrastructure has also remained underdeveloped and has been dilapidating over the years. It sits on a land size of 304 hectares, and it is surrounded by residential areas namely; Mtendere, Presidential Housing Initiative (PHI) and Avondale, with no room for expansion whatsoever.

Sir, let me inform the House and the nation at large that in 2007, Chief Shakumbila of Mumbwa District came to the aid of the Government and offered 1662.23 hectares to NRDC. This land offer was confirmed by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zambia Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu when he visited Mumbwa and met with Chief Shakumbila in 2016.

Mr Speaker, in 2017, the Government received an unsolicited bid from Avic International to develop a brand new NRDC at the land in Mumbwa. Given its foresight, the PF Government accepted the offer from Avic International and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which is an expression of intent. In the MoU, Avic International Project Engineering Company proposes to construct a financial centre at the current NRDC Lusaka College. Once developed, the financial centre will bring a new look to the city of Lusaka and it will create employment opportunities for Zambians.

Mr Speaker, the Government is waiting for a detailed proposal from Avic International on the planned development of the NRDC Campus in Shibuyunji. One of the benefits of having a new NRDC Campus is that it will offer a conducive learning environment for students who will be able to learn and undertake practical applications in agriculture. Furthermore, once developed, the new NRDC will be self sustaining as it will engage in income generating activities given the abundant land of 1,662.23 hectares.

Sir, the current NRDC Campus clearly does not offer a conducive environment for both students and lecturers. Therefore, the move by the Government to build a new NRDC Campus should be supported by all well meaning Zambians.

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Mr Speaker, I thank you.