



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON THE STRIKING NURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY
TEACHING HOSPITAL**

TO BE DELIVERED IN PARLIAMENT BY HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH

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Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for granting me this opportunity to present a ministerial statement on the reported work stoppage by nurses and midwives and through you to address the nation on this important matter. This statement is not only a response to the point of order raised by the Honourable Member of Parliament for Chipata Central but also to address the concerns of the Zambian citizens in general.

PROGRESSION OF SALARIES IN THE LAST TWO YEARS

Mr. Speaker,

Since coming into power in September 2011, The Patriotic Front Government has demonstrated its commitment to progressively improve the conditions of service for all public service workers, nurses and midwives inclusive, in line with our campaign promises and the Manifesto of our party the Patriotic Front. To this effect, my Government and Public Service Unions agreed on pay reforms which are to be implemented over a ten year period with the end result being that of retention of a highly competent and effective civil service which is well remunerated and competitive in the sub – region.

Mr. Speaker,

In line with these reforms, most none duty related allowances were abolished and only the following allowances are still maintained for the nurses: Housing, Transport, and Commuted over-time allowance. Commuted over- time allowance which in 2010 was at 5% of the basic salary has now been increased to 7%. In addition, Health Personnel Shift Differential Allowance has been introduced at 15% of basic salary bringing the current total earnings as follows:

Current Salaries Table compared to 2010

Lowest paid Nurse

	(A) 2010	(B) 2013	% increase (A-B)/A*100)
BASIC	1,940.19	2,912.00	50.09
ALLOWANCES	420	1,513.84	260.44
GROSS TOTAL	2,360.19	4,425,84	87.5

Lowest paid Midwife

	(A) 2010	(B) 2013	% INCREASE (A-B)/A*100)
BASIC	2,014.33	3,328.00	65.22
ALLOWANCES	420	1,730.96	312.13
GROSS TOTAL	2,434.33	5,058.96	107.82

Mr. Speaker,

Comparing the salaries for 2010 for the lowest paid nurse and midwife to 2013, this translates into a difference of 87.5% and 107.82 %, respectively.

In 2010, the lowest paid nurse was getting a total of K2,360.19 as gross pay and today the same workers as lowest paid category are getting K4,426.24 as gross, representing a 21 Percent increase in total earnings. Other conditions of service for nurses and midwives have also improved such as the introduction of Health Personnel shift differential allowance at 15% of the basic salary.

Mr. Speaker,

The Collective agreement signed between ZUNO and the government awarded a collective total income increment of **21 percent** to Nurses and Midwives broken down as follows: **4 percent** increment on basic salary, **2 percent** increment added to the already existing **5 percent** basic salary as commuted night duty allowance and **15 percent** of one's basic salary as the newly introduced health personnel shift differential allowance. In monetary terms these changes have resulted in the lowest paid nurse or midwife salary increment of not less than K600.

However, following the change over to the new salaries and conditions of service which were effected in September, some disparities have been observed resulting in underpayments affecting a very small number of nurses and midwives in salary scale **F** and **G**. For example instead of receiving the agreed upon **4 percent** increment on basic salary some nurses received only **1.1 percent**. This is a problem associated with change management and migration from a fragmented salary structure to a single spine salary structure that government is implementing. The issue has already been brought to the attention of government and corrective measures are being taken. This matter is purely administrative and has nothing to do with the collective agreement.

As late as Friday 4th October 2013 a meeting was held between Public Service Management Division and the representatives of the aggrieved workers at which government agreed to address the grievances raised by the nurses including paying of arrears in those areas that had anomalies.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Mr. Speaker,

On Thursday, 3rd October, 2013, nurses at Lewanika General Hospital in Mongu issued a threat to go on strike, citing cases of non-payment of the recently increased salaries. Following consultations between the local leadership of the Zambia Union of Nursing Organization (ZUNO) and medical authorities in the Provincial Office, this threat was withdrawn. This experience also occurred in Kitwe, Itetzhi-tezhi, Katete and Mazabuka. On the same evening nurses at the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka proceeded to take strike action. Intensive negotiations with Zambia Union of Nursing Organization (ZUNO) national leadership, Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Health started on Friday, 4th October, resulting in a clear statement by Cabinet Office that the anomalies in payment, which were caused by technical fault in administering pay, would be rectified and reflected in the October pay. While Zambia Union of Nursing Organization (ZUNO) agreed with this explanation some nurses at University Teaching Hospital (UTH) ignored it and continued to stay away from work.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me take this opportunity to commend a number of our nurses who continued to work despite these anomalies and thanks to the unions who helped with the situation.

GOVERNMENTS' POSITION

1. There is currently no declared industrial dispute between any of the health workers unions and government. Hence, the reported work stoppage by the nurses and midwives or any other health worker at the moment is illegal.
2. Against this background, Government is extremely disappointed with the action taken by the nurses who resorted to illegal work stoppage as it shows lack of appreciation for the efforts that government has continued to implement in order to improve their conditions of service.
3. In order to continue providing patient care and avoid loss of life due to stoppage of work by the striking nurses management has put in place the following;
 - (a) Engaged students (pre-service, theatre students and midwife students) to provide care to the patients;
 - (b) Requested for support from Directors of private Nursing Schools to deploy their students;
 - (c) Mobilised nurses on contract and part-time to work at the hospital;

(d) Recalled nursing sisters on leave to come back to work;

4. Government engaged the Zambia Union of Nurses Organisations to explain the details and implications of the 2013 Collective Agreement signed between the Government and ZUNO. Further ZUNO has engaged the Public Service Management Division to rectify some disparities that may have been observed on some pay slips.
5. Nurses staying away from work will be subject to the normal charge of absenteeism which will be processed through established procedures.

CONCLUSION

While appreciating the great work which our health professionals continue to do under sometimes difficult circumstances, it is important that governance issues including collective agreements are adhered to by both the government and unions with their membership.

I can therefore only conclude that, while the PF government remains committed to improving the conditions of service for all workers we may be witnessing in this experience the emergence or perpetuation of indiscipline and irresponsibility in the work culture of our highly esteemed health professionals. This phenomenon must be rooted out without delay in the interest of the welfare of society in general and the sick in particular. I call upon all honorable members of this August House to unite in achieving this goal.

Mr. Speaker I thank you.