



GOVERNMENT OF ZAMBIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE COPPERBELT UNIVERSITY

Statement by

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Minister
Ministry of Higher Education

23rd October 2015

Mr. Speaker

I wish to thank you for this opportunity to present my Ministerial Statement on the current events at the Copperbelt University, and the actions that my Ministry has taken to deal with these issues.

Mr. Speaker

I shall start with a reminder of the recent events at the Copperbelt University.

On 22nd June 2015, the Copperbelt University Academic Union wrote a letter to me, then as Minister of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education, in which they informed me of a number of issues in respect of the operations of the Copperbelt University.

The Copperbelt University Academic Union further demanded that the Vice Chancellor and the entire management of Copperbelt University be removed from their positions. This demand was premised on the issues which they had raised in their letter to me.

The Academic Staff, members of the Copperbelt University Academic Union, also immediately withdrew their services and

resolved not to teach until their demands were met. The Academic Staff later resolved to return to work, following a series of meetings, under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Labour and Social Security.

Mr. Speaker,

On 9th July 2015, I presented a Ministerial Statement to this August House. In that Statement, and acting in accordance with the powers of the Minister, as provided under Part III, Section 13 of the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013, I reported that I had taken the following actions.

- (a) The Copperbelt University was closed, indefinitely, with immediate effect. All students were given twenty-four hours to vacate the premises, with effect from 13:00hrs on Wednesday, 8th July 2015.
- (b) The School of Medicine and the School of Graduate Studies at the Copperbelt University were not affected by this closure.

- (c) The Graduation Ceremony to be held on 23rd and 24th July 2015 would be held as scheduled.
- (d) I instructed the Council of the Copperbelt University to work towards resolving the issues which had constrained normal operations of the University, and to ensure that the academic life of the University was restored with minimum delay.
- (e) I instructed the Council of the Copperbelt University to take all the necessary steps to ensure that the recent unfortunate events at the Copperbelt University were not repeated in the future.

On 27th August 2015, I dissolved the Council of the Copperbelt University, and appointed a Ten – Member Caretaker Committee, as provided under Part V, Section 32(2), and Part III, Section 13(3), of the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013, to preside over the affairs of the Copperbelt University. I further, instructed the Caretaker Committee to investigate the claims made by the Copperbelt Academic Union in their letter of 22nd June 2015, addressed to me, as Minister of the then Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education. I also instructed the Caretaker Committee to investigate the circumstances and concerns which culminated in the disruption of academic life at the University.

I instructed the Caretaker Committee to present their Report to me, upon completion of their work.

Mr. Speaker

I wish to inform this August House, that the Caretaker Committee has now presented their Report to me. I further wish to inform this August House that I have accepted the findings and recommendations which have been presented to me by the Caretaker Committee.

Mr. Speaker

The findings of the Caretaker Committee are as follows:

- (1) The Caretaker Committee observed from the documented evidence and from the discussions with parties beyond the Management and the Unions, that Management had not failed in its responsibility for the governance, control and administration of the University.

- (2) The Caretaker Committee observed that the dissolved Council was not negligent in its supervision of the Management on the matters contained in the letter from the Copperbelt University Academic Union to the Minister.
- (3) Contrary to the assertion by the Copperbelt University Academic Union that poor funding of the Institution is not the bigger problem, but that of the misdirection of resources by the Management away from academic work, upon examination of the record of the oral presentations, documented evidence and the interactive discussions held with others mentioned above, the Caretaker Committee observed that limited resources coupled with poor flow of information and lack of well defined internal communication structures were at the centre of the problems at hand.
- (4) A review of Council documents has revealed that most of the issues raised by the CBUAU in their letter to the Honourable Minister were discussed in the Council meetings. This raises the question of whether CBUAU was effectively represented on the CBU Council.

Cases in point are the allegations that Management contracted three loans from Investrust Bank for purchase of Africana, the Graduate School Complex, and Motor vehicles. These matters were discussed in Council but the allegations made by CBUAU show that the Union did not have this information. It was also established that the construction of the Multi-Purpose Facility was not a popular decision among the University Stakeholders. This was the more reason why the Representatives of the Unions on the Council should have taken the responsibility to share information with larger membership on the matters related to the financing of this and other Projects stated above.

- (5) The Caretaker Committee observed that the CBUAU representative on the Council was not sharing Council documents, such as agendas, budgets, resolutions, etc with the CBUAU Executive Committee members. This meant that the CBUAU membership were not effectively represented in the decisions made by the Council.

- (6) The Caretaker Committee's examination of the issues and allegations raised by the CBUAU in the letter to the Hon Minister dated 22nd June 2015 with regard to the Principal Officers, and the evidence gathered after investigations, revealed that there are no sufficient grounds to warrant the call for the Hon. Minister to terminate the services of the Council.
- (7) Finally, although the Committee's findings have established that the CBUAU allegations as contained in the letter to the Hon Minister have largely been without merit, evidence elicited from Deans and Directors point to shortcomings in management style of the current Vice Chancellor. These witnesses informed the Caretaker Committee that the management style was characterized by dictatorial tendencies and centralization of authority, and that Deans of Schools were not considered part of Management as they were not involved in decision making.

Mr. Speaker

The Copperbelt University Academic Union had used the issues raised in their letter dated 22nd June 2015 to me, as the basis and reason for their demand to remove the Vice Chancellor and the entire management of the Copperbelt University.

The Report of the Caretaker Committee has found neither evidence nor merit in the allegations made by the Copperbelt University Academic Union. This means that the demand made by the Copperbelt Academic Union for the removal of the Vice Chancellor, and the entire Management, was premised on allegations which have not been supported by evidence.

Mr Speaker

In view of these findings, I wish to inform this August House that:

- (1) In consultation with the Chancellor of the University, and the Chairman of the Caretaker Committee, we have decided that the Vice Chancellor of the Copperbelt University, Professor Naison Ngoma, who had been on leave during this crisis, will report to duty with immediate effect.
- (2) The current management of the Copperbelt University will remain unchanged.
- (3) All members of the Academic Staff, who had decided to withdraw their services, are requested to end this illegal action and return to work without delay.
- (4) We regret the disruption of the academic life of the Copperbelt University once again. I encourage our students at the University to remain calm, as we work towards normal operations of the University.

Mr. Speaker

There are valuable lessons that we learn from the recent events at the Copperbelt University. It is important that all parts of the University Community begin a serious process of introspection and reforms. Specifically, I wish to request the Caretaker Committee, performing the functions of Council, to undertake the following:

- (1) Work with the Management to ensure cohesion of the entire management structure of the University, from the Vice Chancellor to Heads of Departments;
- (2) Deans of Schools, Directors, and Heads of Departments must be considered as part of Management, and structures should be developed and strengthened to ensure their active and inclusive participation in decision-making;
- (3) All Unions must use established channels for communication with management. Further, Union representatives on governance structures of the University need to strengthen their internal feed-back systems, so that decisions are communicated to their members accurately and timely.

Mr. Speaker

It is my earnest appeal to the Copperbelt University Academic Union to cooperate with the Management and the Caretaker Committee, and work together on those issues that may have caused divisions in the past. The withdrawal of labour, as a weapon to fight for demands hurts all, but helps none. In particular, students should not be used as pawns to enforce demands.

Let us build a credible University that is anchored on a platform of learning, teaching, research, and community service.

Mr. Speaker

I thank you for this opportunity to make this Ministerial Statement.
