



Republic of Zambia

Ministerial Statement by Honourable Dr. Michael L. Kaingu, MP., Minister of Higher Education, on the Closure of the Copperbelt University and the University of Zambia.

9th February 2016

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to thank you for giving me the opportunity to make a Ministerial Statement on the closure of our two major public Universities, namely the University of Zambia (UNZA) Great East Road Campus and the Copperbelt University (CBU).

Sir, on Wednesday, 3rd February 2016 I announced the closure of the two Universities following days of violent protests by students and damage to public property. The only students that were exempted from this closure were those from the school of medicine Ridgeway and Ndola campuses, graduate schools, evening, distance and parallel programmes.

Sir, I wish to state from the outset that the closure of the two universities was a very painful decision that we had to make but unfortunately, that was the only option that students left us with.

Mr. Speaker,

The Education Sector is Government's priority number one. Currently, almost 20% of the national budget goes towards this sector. In order to increase access to university education, Government supports **vulnerable** students that are accepted to pursue studies at UNZA and CBU. As we are still finalising the

establishment of the Loans Board, vulnerable students are supported through the payment of Tuition and accommodation fees, accommodation refunds for students not accommodated by the universities, meal allowances, book allowances, and project allowances.

Sir, Tuition and accommodation fees are paid to the universities at the beginning of every academic year while other allowances are paid directly to the students.

Meal allowances are paid to the students at the beginning of every term. Book allowances are paid to students at the beginning of every academic year. Project and accommodation refunds are paid to entitled students upon receipt of information from the universities.

Mr. Speaker,

The Copperbelt University students were paid book and term one meal allowances on 10th June 2015 (at the beginning of term one); term 2 allowances were paid on 9th November 2015 while project and accommodation refunds were paid on 18th January 2016. Part of the term 3 meal allowances were paid on 2nd

February 2016. The allowance paid was K1, 317.50 per student. This is meal allowance for 59 days out of the 97 days for term 3.

The University of Zambia students were paid book and term one meal allowances on 18th November 2015 (at the beginning of term one), while part of the term 2 meal allowances were paid on 2nd February 2016. The allowance paid was K1, 192.50 per student. This is meal allowance for 53 days out of the 90 days for term 2.

Mr. Speaker,

On Friday 29th January 2016, students at the University of Zambia protested against delayed term 2 meal allowances for the 2015/2016 academic year. On Monday 1st February 2016, students at the Copperbelt University also protested against delayed term 3 meal allowances for the 2015/2016 academic year.

Despite assurances that students would be paid the meal allowance as soon as the Ministry of Finance released funds for that purpose, students chose to take to the streets to disturb the general public and destroy property. Even after payment of the

delayed meal allowances, students chose to continue with their violent protests.

It is important to note that so far all allowances due to the students have been paid. The only allowance that was delayed was the meal allowance. At the time the painful decision to close the universities was made, Government did not owe the students any allowance. I would like to stress this point because there has been misinformation that the decision to close the two Universities stemmed from failure by Government to pay meal allowances to beneficiary students at these Universities. This is totally false.

Mr. Speaker,

It is extremely saddening that students who are supposed to be vulnerable and are receiving this Government support as a privilege are the ones that have chosen to be unruly. The beneficiaries of bursary support at CBU and UNZA ought to realize that their colleagues in other public universities are not enjoying this privilege which they have chosen to abuse. It was wrong to misuse the opportunity of learning and receiving bursaries when many other Zambians desired for such opportunities.

A lot of effort was made to dialogue with the students to return to class but these proved futile. For instance, UNZA management addressed the students on Friday, 29th January 2016 to assure them that Government was doing something about their grievances but they resorted to damaging property including stoning vehicles on great east road, the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Higher Education intervened on the same day, to no avail. In the case of CBU, I personally visited the university and offered to dialogue with the students but they refused.

Sir, I wish to make it clear that Government does not take pleasure in closing institutions of higher learning but will always act to control the situation when students choose to indulge in violent protests and destroy public property instead of concentrating on studies.

I wish to appeal to the student leadership in the country to make extra effort to sensitise their members on matters of discipline, non violent protests and non involvement in active politics. Parents that have children in these institutions also need to do their part by counselling their children to be disciplined.

Opportunities to study at institutions of higher learning should be optimized and not abused. Any disruptions in the academic calendar of these institutions are not only costly to the institutions but the students themselves and the entire nation.

I thank you.