

Ministerial Statement on Status of the Freedoms of Expression, Movement and Assembly in Zambia

Mr. Speaker,

On 19th November, 2015 you directed my office to present a Ministerial Statement to this house on the status of the Freedoms of Expression, Movement and Assembly in the Republic of Zambia. Your directive sir, was as a result of a Point Order raised by the Honorable Member of Parliament for Kalomo Central Constituency, Mr. Request Muntanga, who made allegations to the effect that, the Freedoms of Expression, Movement and Assembly were being infringed upon by the Law Enforcement Agencies in Zambia.

Sir, Honorable Muntanga's allegations arose from the clashes that occurred on 18th November, 2015 at Cha Cha Cha Township in Kitwe around 10.00hrs between the supporters of the United Party for National Development (UPND) and suspected supporters of the Patriotic Front.

Mr. Speaker, to put the record straight, it is essential to make reference to the political activities of the United Party for National Development (UPND) on the Copperbelt over the last few weeks, but particularly between 16 and 22nd November, 2015.

Sir, on 11th November, 2015 the UPND notified the Zambia Police on the Copperbelt of its intention to hold political programmes in the Province, including public rallies. On 13th November, 2015, the Copperbelt Police Command informed the UPND leadership in writing to the effect that, owing to other commitments the Police were not in a position to provide security to any political programmes on the Copperbelt during the month of November, 2015. The Police, however, advised the UPND leadership to postpone their political programmes on the Copperbelt to December 2015. For security reasons, the Police also reminded the UPND leadership to hold their political programmes in neutral venues to enable the police provide adequate security, as opposed to Markets and Stations.

Mr. Speaker, despite the professional advice rendered to the UPND leadership by the Police Command on the Copperbelt, the UPND President and his entourage arrived in Ndola on 16th November, 2015 to embark on their political programme. He addressed a gathering at 13.00hrs at the UPND offices on Makoli Avenue and featured on Sun FM. In the evening, the UPND President could not hold the planned fund raising dinner owing to the venue at Savoy Hotel not being available.

On 17th November, the UPND President and his entourage went to Chililabombwe where he opened the UPND offices. In the evening the UPND President addressed congregants at the Life Gospel Church ministered by Bishop Kazhila and solicited their political support. On 18th November, at about 10.00hrs, UPND supporters gathered at the UPND offices in Cha Cha Cha Township in Kitwe awaiting the arrival of the UPND President. However, prior to the arrival of the UPND leadership some unknown persons went to disrupt the gathering at the UPND offices in Cha Cha Cha Township resulting in clashes between the

gathered UPND supporters and the intruders. As result, about 10 UPND supporters were injured with two of them being seriously injured.

Sir, the Police learnt of the clashes at the Cha Cha Cha UPND offices in Kitwe about 30 minutes into the said clashes and dispatched officers to end the violence. Upon arrival at the UPND offices, a mob of UPND supporters attacked the officers by throwing stone at them. As a result, the police apprehended six (6) unruly UPND supporters for conduct likely to cause a breach of peace. To bring the situation under control, the Police also dispersed everyone from the UPND offices.

Mr. Speaker, on 18th November, 2015, in Luanshya at about 14.30hrs, the Police received a report that, the UPND supporters were gathering at the Old Antelope Shop in the second class Trading Area, where they expected their President to address them. The police rushed to the area and dispersed the crowd to avoid a breakdown of public order in the town. In the process seven suspects were

arrested for conduct likely to cause the breach of peace. At about 16hrs the UPND President arrived at the Second Class Trading Area of Luanshya and tried to hold a public meeting. The police dispersed the crowd and arrested 26 people. During the fracas that ensued between the Police and the UPND supporters one police officer was injured.

Sir, all the people who were arrested for conduct likely to cause the breach of peace in Kitwe and Luanshya were released by 19th November, 2015 upon payment of Admission of Guilt Fines.

Mr. Speaker, I have given a comprehensive account of the Political Activities of the UPND on the Copperbelt between 11 and 18th November 2015 in order to lay bare their unlawful conduct and baseless claims of the law enforcement agencies denying them the enjoyment of the freedoms of expression, movement and assembly as claimed by Hon. Muntanga in his point order. Sir, my Government remains committed to the rule of law and upholding the fundamental freedoms of all our citizens.

Sir, although the UPND leadership disregarded the professional advice of the Police to postpone their political programmes on the Copperbelt to December, the Police did not prevent them from enjoying their fundamental freedoms in line with the law. The UPND President, for example, was able to travel to different towns without hindrance. He even featured on the Sun FM and held indoor meetings without interference.

Mr. Speaker, the Police only intervened in cases where the UPND assemblies led to a breach of public order or had the potential to cause a breach of the peace. The Public Order Act exists to regulate public gatherings and to ensure that we can all go about our business in peace. The Act requires notification of the police so that, they can provide security advice and make personnel available to protect us from others who may not share our political beliefs and aspirations. It was therefore wrong for the UPND leadership to ignore the professional advice rendered by the Police based on the security situation on the Copperbelt. I

therefore call upon all political leaders to work within the law, because all the Police is interested in is to ensure that we maintain law and order at all times and we safe guard peace in our country.

Thank you Mr. Speaker