



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON THE CONTROL OF IN COUNTRY
MOVEMENT OF IMPORTED MEAT
AND MEAT PRODUCTS**

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to express my gratitude for availing me this opportunity to address this honorable house on the issue of in country movement of meat and meat products in Zambia, and with specific reference to Zambeef (PLC) case.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Mr. Speaker,

This August House may wish to note that the movement of meat and meat products in country are regulated under the Public Health Act Cap 295 of the Laws of Zambia, the Meat Abattoir and Butcheries Regulations and the Abattoir and Transport of meat Regulations, and the Food and Drugs Act Cap 303.

Mr. Speaker,

I further wish to state that these pieces of legislation seek to protect the public against health hazards and fraud in the sale and use of food that may cause food borne illness or injury. Food borne hazard is a physical, chemical, or biological object in food or drink that can cause injury or illness to human body.

Most of these hazards are things you cannot see, smell, or taste thereby making the consumers vulnerable to risks associated to consumption of such.

Mr. Speaker,

This house may further wish to note that the Animal Health Act No. 27 of 2010 mandates the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock to issue importation permits with conditions as stated under the Act, while inland conditions are regulated under the Public Health Act which falls within the mandate of Ministry of Health and with powers to delegate the functions to Local Authorities.

DANGERS AROMATIC ALDEHYDES

The human health risks from clinical and animal research studies reviewed indicate that aldehydes can bring about allergies and toxicities to the liver and unborn babies; and they have been found to have potential carcinogenic effects on human health.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Mr. Speaker,

On the 26th day of March 2013, my ministry received a letter from Zambeef complaining of unwarranted disruption of business in their butchereries. This complaint followed inspections by Environmental Health Officers on ZAMBEEF premises and products.

Following this complaint, a multi Ministerial Technical Working group constituting of officers from Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Agriculture

and Livestock (MALS), Ministry of Local Government and Housing (MLGH), Lusaka City Council (LCC), Consumer Competition Protection Commission (CCPC), Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS) was constituted. The aim of the committee was to review the Zambeef case and enable my ministry to respond to issues raised in the letter from Zambeef accordingly.

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to enlighten this honourable house that so far the constituted committee has had meetings with ZAMBEEF (PLC) and made the following observations:

1. The Public Health Act and Food and Drugs Act mandates the Environmental Health Officers/ Health Inspectors to conduct inspections and take samples for analysis of any food or articles in their regular course of duty or when a complaint is received from the Public.
2. The Health inspectors in Ndola, Chingola, Mufulira, Luanshya, Lusaka and Chongwe did carry out food safety control functions and established that there were a lot of violations in handling of meat and meat products on the Zambian market.
3. Further, the Consumer Competition Protection Commission (CCPC) had brought to the Ministry's attention many complaints from members of the public on such as decomposed meat and meat products against the requirements of Consumer Competition Protection Commission and the Food and Drugs Acts.

Mr. Speaker,

In monitoring compliance to standards in accordance with the Laws, the Environmental Health Officers visited among many other premises ZAMBEEF outlets during their routine inspections. This was done for purposes of premise and food inspections with a view to ascertaining compliance to the Law. During these inspections the following were the relevant findings:

- On the sampled meat products, laboratory analysis results indicated Aromatic Aldehyde chemical and Microbial contamination.
- Meat parts did not have the inspection incisions and were not marked as “passed fit for Human consumption” as per requirements of the Public Health (Meat Abattoir, and Butcheries Regulations and Abattoir and Transport of Meat Regulations)

Mr. Speaker,

The omission of incisions indicates that the consignment was not declared to the Local Authorities for the purposes of inspection and branding when it was brought into the concerned districts.

Further, the storage methods were observed not to be adequate as it allowed for cross-contamination especially on the packages that were torn. The fact that there were no parts attached to the carcasses raised a concern as to the animal origin of the parts (whether they were of a cow or otherwise).

Mr. Speaker,

To this effect, the first consignment was seized, samples collected and submitted to the Veterinary Laboratory for chemical analysis in order to ascertain whether the animal parts were of bovine origin or otherwise. The results have since been received and indicated that the meat parts were of cow origin.

However, samples taken from Copperbelt and Lusaka Provinces for chemical analysis have indicated that items from several outlets contained Microbial contamination and **Aromatic Aldehydes**, which is an inedible chemical commonly used in embalming and preservation of human flesh.

Noting that the expiry dates for fresh meat products were extremely long stretching to June 2014, the tests were conducted in order to verify the preservatives used. Normally, internal organs of cattle and other animals usually last for an average period of six months at less than negative 35 or less than 4 degrees Celsius in cold blast freezers.

ACTION TAKEN

Mr. Speaker,

My Ministry has the responsibility of protecting Public Health in Zambia and has since listed and recommended to subject all meat products to this Laboratory analysis which also includes other food articles from farm to folk.

So far, my Ministry has held consultations with ZAMBEEF Management representatives upon receipt of their complaint, and these have been informed that the authorized officers acted within their mandate provided by the Public Health Act Cap 295 of the laws of Zambia (Meat, Abattoir and Butcheries Regulations and the Abattoir and Transport of Meat Regulations).

Mr. Speaker,

This house may wish to know that importation permit is not a guarantee that products will not be subjected to inspections upon arrival, but could be used as a guiding document by the importer to communicate to the exporting country on the Zambian legal requirements for food articles. Among many other issues it clears questions on the reputation of the exporting country.

Mr. Speaker,

Following the seizure of meat and meat products for investigation purposes, some of the meat that remained has been tampered with and others have since disappeared from where they were kept at respective premises.

Therefore, my Ministry will take legal action against the company in the districts where seizure was effected upon conclusion of the investigations. Further it has been decided that all meat and meat products imported be examined whether such meat is inspected and samples be procured from any such container entering Zambia.

Further, the following actions and precautions have been taken:

- Sampling of the meat products in question has been carried and submitted for quantitative analysis to the Regional Food Safety laboratories in South Africa where we have a CODEX reference laboratory to ascertain the levels of contamination of the chemical on the products;
- The items under seizure remain seized;
- Zambeef (Plc) to voluntarily remove all viscera parts from the market and quarantine them;
- All products in transit to be allowed in the country but to be quarantined for analysis;
- Further quality assurance testing on batch to batch to be done and the cost of these tests to be incurred by Zambeef (Plc);
- Zambeef (Plc) to also have a laboratory of their own in order to do internal quality controls;
- Zambeef (Plc) to announce to the public the voluntary removal of products; and
- Only the Minister of Health to release all press statements regarding the Zambeef (Plc) case.

WAY FORWARD

Mr. Speaker,

On the basis of further findings, my Ministry will take other actions as appropriate and further following the events and for the sake of protecting the Public from food borne hazards, my Ministry is also in the process of drafting a Statutory Instrument to guide the in country movement of meat and meat products.

Finally Mr. Speaker, my Ministry will work closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and other relevant ministries in order to strengthen and harmonize the operations for purposes of safeguarding Public Health.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you

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