



**GOVERNMENT OF ZAMBIA**

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EARLY  
EDUCATION**

# **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE COPPERBELT UNIVERSITY**

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**Statement by**

**Hon. Dr. Michael L. Kaingu PhD., MP**  
**Minister**  
**Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and**  
**Early Education**

**9<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

**Mr. Speaker**

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

**Mr. Speaker**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2015, the Copperbelt University Academic Union wrote a letter to me, 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.

On the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2015, barely a few hours after they delivered the letter to my Ministry, the Copperbelt University Academic Union made a public statement on the contents of their letter to the Minister, and further demanded that their concerns be addressed with immediate effect.

The Copperbelt University Academic Union further demanded that the Vice Chancellor and the entire management of Copperbelt University be removed from their positions.

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 Copperbelt University Academic Union and its Members have, since 24<sup>th</sup> June 2015, withheld their services, and no teaching has been taking place at the Copperbelt University since then.

The Ministry instructed the Council of the Copperbelt University to study the concerns of the Copperbelt University Academic Union, and to prepare their advice to the Minister. In accordance with the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013, the Council of a Public University is responsible for the governance, control and administration of the higher education institution.

The Council of the Copperbelt University met on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015. Among the matters before the Council Meeting was the resolution of the concerns expressed by the Copperbelt University Academic Union, and the need to restore the normal academic and administrative life of the University.

Despite many attempts by the Council, and specific interventions by the Chairman of the Council, to persuade the Copperbelt University Academic Union to resume classes, to remove their threats, and to engage in dialogue, the Copperbelt University Academic Union refused to engage in dialogue.

The Council of the University informed the Copperbelt University Academic Union that the Council was ready and willing to discuss all their concerns, but that this could only be done under an atmosphere of constructive dialogue and not through threats and illegal strikes. The Copperbelt University Academic Union refused any form of dialogue unless their demands were met.

The Senate of the Copperbelt University met on Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2015, and proposed that the Chancellor holds a meeting with the Copperbelt University Academic Union, to seek their return to work and to engage in dialogue. The Copperbelt University Academic Union refused to meet with the Chancellor of the University.

In all this, students at the University are not being provided with the education for which they have been enrolled, and for which parents, guardians, and sponsors have paid. This situation is unacceptable, and could not be allowed to continue.

It is unfortunate that the Copperbelt University Academic Union spurned all requests and opportunities for dialogue, and continued with their illegal strike.

My Ministry is determined to ensure that the academic and administrative functions of the Copperbelt University are restored, so that the University can deliver on its mandate to provide qualified human resources for the development of our country. This mandate could not be delivered in a situation where academic staff withdrew their services and spurned all efforts at dialogue.

**Mr. Speaker**

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 have taken the following actions.

- (a) The Copperbelt University has been closed, indefinitely, with immediate effect. All students have been given twenty-four hours to vacate the premises, with effect from 13:00hrs on Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015.
- (b) The School of Medicine and the School of Graduate Studies at the Copperbelt University have not been affected by this closure. I wish to commend the academic and administrative staff of these two Schools for their dedication to duty, and for not taking part in the illegal strike.
- (c) The Graduation Ceremony to be held on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> July 2015 will be held as scheduled.

- (d) The Council of the Copperbelt University has been instructed to work towards resolving the issues which have constrained normal operations of the University, and to ensure that the academic life of the University is restored with minimum delay.
- (e) I have instructed the Council of the Copperbelt University to take all the necessary steps to ensure that the recent unfortunate events at the Copperbelt University are not repeated in the future.

I wish to express our sincere regret to Parents, Guardians, and Sponsors of Students at the Copperbelt University for this break in the academic programme. This action has not been taken lightly.

The Chancellor, the Council, and the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education, have all worked diligently to seek restoration of the academic life of the University, while addressing the problems expressed by the Copperbelt University Academic Union. Unfortunately, the Copperbelt University Academic Union has been extremely intransigent and has refused to engage in any form of dialogue.

To the students, I wish to assure you that we shall seek to make this closure as short as possible. I urge all of you to keep calm, and to allow the Council of the University to work towards the resolution of the issues which have disrupted your academic programmes.

To the academic and administrative staff of the Copperbelt University, we continue to encourage a spirit of dialogue and discussion. This should be a normal feature of an academic institution, in contrast to illegal withdrawal of services, and the holding of students as hostages. We need to move forward, and to seek solutions to our many problems in a spirit of cooperation.

### **Mr. Speaker**

As Minister responsible for Higher Education, I am aware that there are many problems in our Higher Education System. Many of these problems have rolled over from past years, and may not be solved within a short period. However, it is important that all players in the sub-sector work together towards finding solutions to these problems.

These problems can be categorized broadly as follows:



- (a) Financial obligations in the form of accrued statutory obligations, and staff benefits;
- (b) Constraints on available infrastructure for teaching, learning and student accommodation facilities, given increasing numbers of school-leavers seeking University education;
- (c) Insufficient numbers of staff in the academic faculties;
- (d) Insufficient staff at the level of Professor, to provide guidance to younger staff, particularly in research;
- (e) Inadequate learner support systems, such as access to the Internet for learning and research;
- (f) The need for a sustainable financing mechanism for Higher Education.

These problems are not peculiar to the Higher Education System in Zambia. Many developing countries in Africa and beyond are having to deal with these issues. It is in all our interests that we work together, despite the magnitude and breadth of these problems. These problems will not be dealt with through threats, illegal work stoppages, nor the holding of student as hostages for the demands of certain sections of the University community.

**Mr. Speaker**

The Government has already begun to deal with these issues. However, it would be naïve to anticipate solutions to these problems within a period of one financial year. It is, however, feasible and necessary that all concerned parties work together to resolve these issues.

The Universities should be the source of new thinking and problem solving. Unfortunately, the events at the Copperbelt University have not provided good evidence of ability towards problem solving. Threats and intimidation seem to have replaced rational thinking and dialogue.

**Mr. Speaker**

It is our belief, however, that the recent events at the Copperbelt University do not represent the true character of our Higher Education System, because we know that the system, despite the difficulties, still possesses the ability and resolve to play their part in the development process for our country. However, this ability to contribute should not be sacrificed at the alter of problems.

**Mr. Speaker**

The temporary closure of the Copperbelt University is regretted. I have instructed the Council of the University to resolve the issues in the shortest possible time, so that we can restore teaching, learning and research at this University. The Copperbelt University should come out of this crisis with renewed vigour and resolve to use dialogue, discussion, innovation, and all avenues of communication, to ensure that this institution grows into a reputable learning and research centre.

**Mr. Speaker**

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

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