

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON THE

PURPORTED RISE IN NEWBORN DEATHS AT PETAUKE DISTRICT HOSPITAL

BY

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH (MRS MASEBO), MP

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank you for granting me this opportunity to update the House and the nation at large on the purported rise in newborn deaths at Petauke District Hospital. The House may wish to recall that on 26th October, 2023 during the Matter of Urgent Public Importance segment the Hon. Madam First Deputy Speaker directed me to issue a ministerial statement on the purported rise in newborn deaths at Petauke District Hospital.

Madam Speaker, the directive followed a Matter of Urgent Public Importance raised by Hon. Emmanuel Jay Banda, Member of Parliament for Petauke Central Parliamentary Constituency who was concerned with the rise in newborn deaths at Petauke District Hospital.

Madam Speaker, I wish from the onset to inform the House that the newborn deaths recorded this year (2023) in Zambia from January to September is 2, 870 of which Eastern Province has contributed 278, and twenty-six being reported from Petauke District specifically.

Madam Speaker, while it is of serious concern that we are losing a lot of newborn babies in the country, our data does not agree with the assertion of losing of five newborn babies per day in Petauke, and the Government has put in place measures to ensure that newborn deaths are kept as low as reasonably or practicably achievable

Madam Speaker, the House may wish to note that most of the neonatal deaths, that is 95 per cent, tend to occur in referral facilities or hospitals where neonatal Intensive Care Units (ICU) and special baby care units are established. About 4.5 per cent of newborn deaths occur at primary

healthcare facilities and 0.5 per cent die at the community level. The largest medical cause of neonatal deaths is asphyxia, accounting for 49 per cent. Asphyxia refers to the failure to initiate spontaneous breathing at birth, commonly due to a difficult delivery. The next highest cause of death is attributed to prematurity or babies being born before their due date at 40 per cent. Thirdly, sepsis or infections that come due to unclean delivery accounts for 7 per cent of neonatal deaths.

Madam Speaker, the Government has put in place the following measures to ensure that the gains that have been achieved so far are sustained:

- (a) introduced a new program to train nurses and doctors specialized in newborn care;
- (b) developed standards and training materials for the care of the small and sick newborns;
- (c) expanding Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) units to all Health facilities for the care of stable preterm babies;
- (d) procured drugs to treat prematurity before birth and after birth (steroids and surfactant);
- (e) establishing and refurbishing neonatal intensive care units in referral facilities;
and
- (f) procuring appropriate ambulances to facilitate the movement of newborn babies during referral.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member of Parliament for Petauke Central also alluded to the status of the Mother's Waiting Shelter at Petauke District Hospital. I wish to inform the House that Petauke District Hospital is a very old infrastructure having been built from the 1950s. As such,

the infrastructure is both dilapidated and inadequate. The current Mother's Shelter at the hospital is inadequate with a capacity of about thirty to forty mothers while in fact on average there are about eighty mothers at the shelter at any one point. This facility also did not have adequate ablution services, until earlier this year when the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) attended to this requirement.

Madam Speaker, in light of the foregoing, I wish to inform this august House that the District Health Team has submitted a request for the construction of a bigger and modern Mother's Shelter against the 2024 Constituency Development Fund.

Madam Speaker, as I conclude, I wish to request the hon Member of Parliament for Petauke Central, and indeed all the Members of Parliament, that working with the communities, the local authorities, and all other stakeholders, let us continue supporting the District Health Offices, especially in addressing requirements that will improve maternal and child health.

Madam Speaker, allow me to also inform the House, that the Government through the Ministry of Health has put in place a robust tracking system of key national health indicators such as infant mortality, under-five mortality, and maternal mortality. The gains made in these indicators are due to increased investments in health infrastructure, recruitment of health workers, strong Government leadership, leveraging on newer technology for service delivery, and increased financial investment among other investments

Madam Speaker, I thank you.
