

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC) AND ZAMBIA BORDER CRISIS

**The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation (Mr Kakubo):** Madam Speaker, I, first of all, thank you for this opportunity to present to this august House a statement on a matter of utmost importance regarding measures that have been taken by the Government of the Republic of Zambia to ensure the safety and security of its nationals at its borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), particularly at Kasumbalesa and Mokambo. This is in line with the directive given by Madam Speaker, following the intervention through a point of order that was raised by the Member of Parliament for Shiwang'andu Constituency, Hon. Stephen Kampyongo.

Madam Speaker, let me state, from the outset, that the Government was saddened to learn about the loss of lives of truck drivers who were allegedly beaten and shot dead in the DRC as, indeed, any loss of life is disheartening. I, therefore, wish to extend my deep and heartfelt sympathy, on behalf of the Zambian Government, to the families of the deceased.

Madam Speaker, our missions, in both Lubumbashi and Kinshasa commenced consultative meetings with Government officials in the DRC, following the security concerns on the ground.

Madam Speaker, let me also take this opportunity to state that investigations, so far, have revealed that one of the two drivers, who was reported on in the media, died at a hospital in Kolwezi where he was admitted after a bout of malaria while the other, who was also reported on in the media, was found dead in his truck. The nearby health institution where he was rushed indicated in its report that our national had suffered a heart attack while driving along the Kamoia/Kolwezi Road on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2022.

Madam Speaker, when these incidents took place, amongst others, Zambian truck drivers reacted by protesting and refusing to cross the border as they requested that their security concerns be immediately addressed by the Government of the Republic of Zambia and the government of the DRC.

Madam Speaker, the reasons for staging these protests included the following:

- (a) the lack of security, as truck drivers are attacked for their money, food and other personal belongings;
- (b) exorbitant charges being applied at every checkpoint, including illegal ones;
- (c) the lack of medical care when drivers fall ill outside our borders; and

- (d) in the event of death, it is usually difficult to repatriate the bodies of deceased persons from the DRC into Zambia.

Madam Speaker, it is due to the highlighted reasons that the truck drivers decided not to enter the neighbouring DRC until these security issues were dealt with in order to protect them.

Madam Speaker, arising from the background that we have provided, there was no movement of trucks northbound into the DRC, which led to many trucks being marooned on the Zambian side of the border although southbound trucks from the DRC to the Zambian side were flowing.

Madam Speaker, the non-movement of northbound traffic made the Zambian side of the border develop long queues meandering all the way down through Chililabombwe, Chingola and Chambishi.

Madam Speaker, it is worth noting that the Mokambo Border Post in Mufulira was also affected by protesting drivers citing similar security concerns. This led to a huge congestion of trucks bound for the DRC stretching more than 2 km.

Madam Speaker, I wish to report to the august House that the President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency, Mr Hakainde Hichilema, on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2022, had a telephone conversation with his counterpart, His Excellency, Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, President of the DRC, regarding the highlighted concerns. Thereafter, further engagements with our counterparts from the DRC continued with the Zambian side being led by the hon. Minister of Defence, together with the hon. Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security, the Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry and the Provincial Minister for the Copperbelt Province.

Madam Speaker, as hon. Members of the House may be aware, our Government continues to enjoy cordial relations with the DRC. Therefore, measures have been put in place to ensure that we have a permanent solution to the problem.

Madam Speaker, as of 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2022, the following resolutions were reached and agreed to by the two sides to kick-start this process:

- (a) in order to reduce the congestion of trucks at the border, it was resolved that as at 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2022, at 6 am in the morning, trucks would begin to cross the border. This has begun.
- (b) the Government of the DRC assured the Zambian Government that vehicles would be deployed to conduct patrols on a twenty-four-hour basis through Kasumbalesa, Lubumbashi, Likishi and the Kolwezi Corridor to ensure the safety of transiting drivers.
- (c) the creation of an SOS green line that would be used by truck drivers to communicate and raise security alerts within the DRC when problems arose.

However, our Government still remains concerned about the timely response when alerts are made;

- (d) radio-active scanners at entry points will now be switched off in order to allow drivers to disembark their trucks before scanning is conducted. This is important; and
- (e) the two sides have agreed to jointly monitor the security situation constantly and to ensure regular communication between the two Governments.

Madam Speaker, I wish to further indicate that our mission in Kinshasa DRC and our consulate in Lubumbashi have been closely monitoring the situation on the ground and are also engaging senior Government officials on both the DRC and the Zambian sides in order to ensure that what was agreed upon between the two Heads of State is carried out.

Madam, ensuring the security of our people, especially our Zambian drivers, across the borders, following these concerns is a priority to this Government. We would like to commend our drivers for their bravery and also proactively providing information to the Zambia Government regarding their concerns on their safety.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I wish to assure the House and the Zambian citizenry that the Government is working tirelessly to ensure that law enforcement officers on our side are involved in this process of ensuring that the safety of our people is guaranteed and normalcy resumes. As it is, trucks have started to flow and, as the Government, we will continue to monitor the situation closely.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.