

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON THE

FOREST SECTOR

BY THE

THE MINISTER OF GREEN ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT (MR NZOVU), MP

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank you sincerely for according me this opportunity to deliver a ministerial statement to this House and through this House the nation at large. This is regarding one issue of great importance and interest to the 'New Dawn' Government and Zambians at large; the forest sector.

Madam Speaker, forests are one of the most important natural resources from which citizens enhance their livelihoods through the provision of various products such as wood fuel and timber within the legal bounds of the law. Forests provide several ecological benefits that are cardinal to our attainment of sustainable socio-economic development, which include the following:

- (a) watershed protection, which is key in the provision of safe and clean water supply;
- (b) nurturing of the soil and protecting it from soil erosion, which is an important aspect for a highly agricultural country such as Zambia; and
- (c) forests help to sequester and store carbon dioxide, which is one of the main greenhouse gases responsible for climate change.

Madam Speaker, it is for such reasons as stated earlier that hon. Members of this House will appreciate the provisions of the Forests Act No. 4 of 2015, which provides for:

- (a) the security of forest resources for the benefit of the current and future generations;
- (b) conservation and protection of ecosystems, particularly land, wildlife and water supplies of strategic importance;
- (c) improved forest resource management and sustainable utilisation of forest resources at both national and local levels;
- (d) the management of major water catchments and headwaters; and
- (e) meeting the social, cultural and economic needs of local communities.

Madam Speaker, notwithstanding the above, the Government has observed with great concern high levels of illegalities in relation to the country's forestry resources, including the following:

- (a) the mushrooming of settlements in protected forest areas, including watershed areas, resulting in the loss of 33 per cent of forest cover across the country;
- (b) the uncontrolled harvesting, trade and export of indigenous valuable timber species such as mukula;
- (c) the increased and illegal cutting down of trees for charcoal production; and
- (d) quarrying, sand mining and mining of manganese and other minerals.

Madam Speaker, as a result of these illegal activities, almost all the 470 forest reserves, including water catchment areas, have been encroached. This unfortunate situation needs to be halted if our country is to develop and become the middle income nation that we aspire it to be.

Madam Speaker, I, therefore, want to take this opportunity to inform this House and the general public at large that encroachment on forest reserves and conducting of various illegal activities without a permit or licence issued by the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment is illegal and offenders will be prosecuted. The 'New Dawn' Government was voted into office to deliver development and this can only happen if we do things within the confines of the law. I want to categorically state that no development can happen in the midst of lawlessness.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will soon take definitive measures to mitigate the loss of and protect the forest reserves. Therefore, without having to resort to issuance of eviction notices, I urge all entities or individuals that have encroached the forests to move out immediately. While it may be noted that such directives have been given before by previous Government and yielded nothing, I want to assure this House that this is a national issue and all must take heed to abide by the law because the 'New Dawn' Government means business.

Madam Speaker, in executing this noble cause, the ministry will collaborate with other government agencies, including the ministries of defence, homeland security we well as tourism to ensure that the rule of law is adhered to.

Madam Speaker, allow me to address other forestry related issues such as the high rate of deforestation, the potential of the forestry sector in creating jobs and wealth and the state of the Forestry Department.

Madam Speaker, the country is losing about 270,000 ha of forest cover per year. This is attributed to various factors that include unsustainable timber harvesting practices, unsustainable agriculture practices, late forest fires and infrastructure development. Deforestation on account of the indiscriminate cutting down of trees contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, resulting in extreme weather conditions that is evidenced by the frequency of droughts, floods and

unpredictable rainy seasons. These conditions threaten the health and stability of ecosystems, ultimately slowing down economic growth for the country. It is quite evident that these effects of climate change have not spared Zambia.

Madam Speaker, a study on “Benefits of forest ecosystems in Zambia and the role of Redd + in a green economy transformation” revealed that forests are important as outlined below:

- (a) the value of wood production (industrial round wood and fuel wood) is estimated at K6.8 billion per annum;
- (b) the value of non-wood forest products is estimated at an average of K2.3 billion per annum;
- (c) potential for Redd + projects in terms of carbon can also be valued in terms of its market value estimated at an average of K171 per tonne. Depending on location, carbon stocks in Zambian forests are potentially worth about K2,561 per ha on average, but range up to K12,000 per ha for intact forests. Annual values of sequestration in degraded areas are about K273 to K500 ha per year.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, preserving our forests can be viewed as another avenue to generate the much needed revenue for the growth of our economy.

Madam Speaker, in terms of contribution to the national economy, forests are estimated to make a direct contribution to about 5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or K16 billion per annum. When the multiplier effects of forestry and tourism related activities and other sectors are considered, the overall or economy-wide contribution of forests is estimated to be at least 6 per cent of GDP or K21 billion per annum.

Madam Speaker, forests provide at least 1.4 million jobs, supporting 60 per cent of the rural Zambian households who are heavily dependent on the use of natural resources to supplement or

sustain their livelihoods. Further, forests contribute to approximately 20 per cent of rural household incomes, including the market value of subsistence production.

Madam Speaker, I am glad that the hon. Member agrees with me that legalities in the forest sector were very high in the previous Government—in his Government. We need to put an end to this. In my statement, I was very clear that we are studying the degazetion of many forests. We lost many forests in the previous regime, some unnecessarily so. So, we are studying the issues and, where the applicable laws were violated we are recommending **regazetion** of the forest.

I thank you, Madam.
