

MINISTERIALS STATEMENT
ON THE
ALLEGED GOLD SCANDAL
BY THE
THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS AND INTERNAL SECURITY (MR
MWIIMBU), MP

Madam Speaker, as I present this ministerial statement, it is important to note that this particular matter is currently in court. I would urge my hon. Colleagues not to raise issues that hinge on matters that are currently in court.

Madam Speaker, let me thank you for giving me the opportunity to update the nation through this House on the alleged gold scandal that was unearthed by law enforcement officers at the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport (KKIA) on 13th August, 2023. Similarly, I want to thank the investigative wings for dedicating significant amount of time to sorting out the alleged scandal over the last half of the month of August, 2023.

Madam, as this august House may already have noted, the country has vast mineral resources, including gold. In the recent months, major discoveries of gold deposits have been made across the country. This development has attracted a number of locals and foreign nationals to exploit the resource for personal benefit. As a consequence, there has been an upsurge in illegal mining and processing of minerals in the country.

Madam Speaker, for the matter at hand, let me present the brief facts. On 13th august, 2023, a foreign aircraft with registration number T7 WSS Global Express jet landed at KKIA from Cairo, Egypt. The aircraft was conveying Mr Michael Adel Michel Botros, an Egyptian national and renowned international businessman, for a business transaction at the instigation of a named local Zambian businessman and another foreign business partner. In particular, Mr Botros was scheduled to purchase gold for which he made a down payment to cater for, among other things, transshipment and customs clearance of the purported gold. To this end, the so-called suppliers

of the gold engaged various players to facilitate access to KKIA for the transaction which appears to be a scam.

Madam, following a tip-off, the law enforcement agencies impounded the aircraft in question and searched it. After the search, the following items were found and seized from the aircraft:

- (a) US\$5,697,700;
- (b) 602 bars of purported gold weighing about 127.28 kg;
- (c) four bars of gold, weighing 1,414.17 g, authenticated by the relevant authorities;
- (d) five pistols and eleven pistol magazines;
- (e) 126 rounds of ammunition; and
- (f) one drilling machine.

Madam Speaker, based on the findings, law enforcement agencies decided to charge five Egyptians and six Zambians with espionage on the premise that they accessed the air-side, which is a restricted area, for purposes that were prejudicial to safety and interest of the Republic of Zambia, contrary to Section 3 (a) of the State Security Act, Cap. 111 of the Laws of Zambia. On the other hand, the four crew members of the Global Express jet were cleared and released from custody and have returned to their different countries. On Friday, 1st September, 2023, the state entered a *nolle prosequi* in respect of the five Egyptians and one Zambian national, while the rest were committed to the High Court.

Madam, I also wish to report that law enforcement agencies have since recovered more fake gold and arrested various accomplices who participated in processing and transporting the fake gold to KKIA. In addition, various accounts for suspects have been restricted and recoveries of the monies suspected to be bribes and extortion from the victims, have been made. At the same time,

investigative wings have launched a pursuit of those that participated in the crime and are believed to be hiding within and outside the country.

Madam Speaker, in order to address the unlawful exploitation of our natural resources, especially gold, the Government has deployed security personnel at the various sites identified to have gold and other mineral deposits following the declaration of gold as a strategic mineral and enhanced collaboration between the mines safety department with security agencies besides improving intelligence gathering, among other measures.

Madam Speaker, combating all forms of criminal activities is a top new dawn administration priority. That is especially true when the criminal activity involves exploitation of the country's much sort for resources; resources that could change the lives of many of our citizens. We are committed to protecting our resources and we will continue to respond to this challenge.

Madam Speaker, to anyone thinking of engaging in criminal activities my advice is simple, do not. No matter where you are or who you are, we will find you and prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law. We will not allow our citizens or the critical resources that they are endowed with to be preyed upon by those seeking to satisfy their selfish desires.

The Government shall continue to relentlessly deal with perpetrators of crime, while creating a conducive environment for legitimate business transactions. More importantly, the Government remains committed to ensuring that no one is shielded for engaging in crimes regardless of their status, while suspects are afforded their rights in accordance with the law.

Madam Speaker, as I conclude, may I also take this opportunity to commend the members of the joint investigation team that has been assembled to look into the occurrence and the various investigative wings, as well as the general public, for the job done, so far, in helping to unveil the mystery surrounding the gold scam. I must, however, hasten to mention that the investigative wings require to capture the remaining fugitives and, as such, the cooperation of the general public is very much needed.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.
