

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF CHIEFS AND  
TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS TO UPDATE THE HOUSE  
ON THE PROPOSED NATION-WIDE CAMPAIGN  
AIMED AT COMBATING AND MITIGATING  
EFFECTS OF EARLY CHILD MARRIAGES IN  
ZAMBIA THROUGH CHIEFS.**

**Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs  
Fairley Road  
P.O. Box 50117  
LUSAKA**

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## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Mandate**

One of the Functions of the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs (MOCTA) is to advocate for development in Chiefdoms throughout Zambia with chiefs at the centre of analysis. In addition the Ministry has been tasked to administer and promote chiefs affairs, traditional governance systems and preserve Zambia's heritage and culture for sustainable development and national identity.

In advocating for development in Chiefdoms, MOCTA has noted that there are a number of things happening in the chiefdoms that are hindering development. These amongst others include alcohol and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS with emphasis on total prevention and elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS, promoting environmental protection, early child marriages, water and sanitation, poverty reduction with emphasis on livelihoods and nutrition in particular.

Therefore MOCTA recognizes that these cross cutting issues hinder development and can affect the delivery of its mandate of spearheading rural development.

Amongst the cross-cutting issues that MOCTA wants to address as affecting overall human development and Rural/Chieftdom development in particular is early child marriages. In view of this, my Ministry has decided to put a three year plan to campaign against early Child marriage which contributes to a series of negative consequences both for young girls and boys. The implementation of the plan to campaign against early child marriage will be done in partnership with other government institutions such as Ministry of Gender and Child Development, Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education, Ministry of Community Development Mother and Child Health, Ministry of Health, Civil Society Organisations and Development Partners.

Apart from this act being a violation of human rights in general and of girls and boys rights in particular, it has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts. Early child marriages is a form of Gender Based Violence (Physical, Sexual and Emotional), it has serious Sexual and Reproductive Health consequences: children dropping out of school at a tender age affects their overall Human Development.

The other effects of early child marriages include:

- Child labour;
- Children in early marriages find themselves in relationships of multiple sex partners and this may expose them to Sexually Transmitted infections, some of which have serious consequences such as HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B and Papilloma Virus the cause of Cervical Cancers;
- Denies children of their basic rights such as being in school or teenagership; and
- The effect of dropping out of school early affects their whole human development
- In the majority of cases these marriages tend to be abusive as the child is not ready for marriage and can be a recipe for alcohol and substance abuse.
- Early child marriage is a recipe to poverty, poor livelihood and subsequently poor nutrition.

### **The campaign**

Although available data indicate that early child marriages affect both girls and boys and the campaign will focus on both girls and boys, more emphasis will be placed on girls as this is an issue that affects more girls than boys.

### **Why this campaign**

The early child marriage has been identified as a vice that negatively impacts or linked to activities in communities that are likely to hinder development in the country. These include Gender Based Violence, Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, Human Development. In order to achieve the desired results, Chiefs have been identified as critical in the campaign and the reason why they will provide the leadership in the whole campaign.

One may argue that there are already existing programs being supported by various Government institutions, Civil Society, Church organizations and Development partners in the rural areas to combat early child marriages and mitigate the effects in chiefdoms. The known fact is that most of the interventions that have been carried out so far are disjointed and uncoordinated and thus impact has been minimal. It is for this reason that as a ministry we believe that an expanded and a Community Enhancement response that is well coordinated will yield better results of benefit to rural Zambia which is severely affected with underdevelopment.

### **What will be the role of the chiefs?**

Although, early child marriages is a major problem it is not easy to resolve and chiefs have been identified as an important resource that can contribute to resolving this problem through the provision of leadership. In their advocacy for change, the Chiefs voices can be respected and if early child marriage is anchored on culture, customs and traditions, the chiefs are the custodians of culture, customs and traditions they are best suited as agents of change. They will initiate the desired change by advocating for discarding or change of cultures, customs and Traditional practices that promote early child marriages. The Royal Highnesses being key stakeholders will provide leadership in their chiefdoms by championing the fight against early marriages.

### **Elements of the Campaign**

1. Launch a Nation-wide Campaign against early child marriages in Zambia by mobilizing Chiefs and other traditional leaders to spearhead the campaign to eliminate and mitigate against early child marriages. This will be done in partnership with Cooperating Partners, Civil Society, Local Communities, Political and other opinion leaders at all levels;

2. Raise public awareness on the negative impact that early child marriages has on Zambia's development agenda;
3. Reduce in the short term and eliminate in the long term early child marriages;
4. Mitigate against the effects of early child marriages (in cases where children are already married); and
5. Develop and implement human developmental activities such as capacity building and entrepreneurial programs that would mitigate the effects of early child marriage.

### **Modus Operandii**

Before the actual campaign starts, a situation analysis will be done to provide evidence as a basis for the campaign, workshops as well as interactive sessions will be conducted for the chiefs and Media throughout Zambia. The outcome of these sessions will be the fact that the Chiefs, Media, opinion leaders in the communities will be empowered with knowledge, on the dangers of early marriages and why certain cultural and traditional beliefs need to be discarded or changed. Furthermore communication experts will design appropriate

messages targeting parents, opinion leaders and the children themselves.

This campaign is expected to last for three years but at the end of one year we intend to host a conference to share the lessons learnt. For value add, we shall do a resource mapping, an analysis of the situation on ground and identify the necessary strategies and activities to mitigate effects of child marriages.

### **Partnership**

The Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs has set as its target to spearhead and coordinate a campaign to combat early child marriages and mitigate the effects throughout the country with the involvement of other relevant Government Ministries such as Gender, Community, Maternal and Child Health, Education, Justice, Home Affairs and Health, relevant Institutions working and researching early child marriages, such as the University of Zambia, Chiefs, Communities, Religious leaders, Civil Society and Development partners. The Graca Machel Trust will be partnering with Zambia on the launch of a nation-wide campaign and follow up activities to combat and mitigate against the negative effects of early child marriage in Zambia by mobilizing Chiefs and other traditional leaders.

## **Time frame**

MOCTA has developed a concept paper after wide consultations with key stakeholders. The campaign is initially planned for three years. The National Launch is planned for 13<sup>th</sup> April 2013 to be graced by the First Lady of Zambia, Dr. Christine Kaseba Sata in a chiefdom to be identified. The criteria to be used in choosing the chiefdom will be the chiefdom which has the highest prevalence of early child marriages based on available data. Min-launches are also planned for in all provinces in chiefdoms with high prevalence of early child marriages. I shall expect support to launch these minis launches by my sister ministries and hopefully honorable members of parliament for that province will give support by being present and identifying with this novel idea.

As a follow up to these launches, the awareness, advocacy, capacity building activities and a regional conference will continue as per our action plan of three years.

## **Role of Parliamentarians**

As law makers and considering that most of you here are from rural constituencies, my humble request is for you to join in the campaign and add your voices in condemning the vice. Further, I urge you to objectively support bills that will be

brought to parliament which may be aiming at putting corrective measures in bringing to an end early child marriage in Zambia. For example we need the national definition of a child. For the purpose of getting a National Registration Card, the recommended age is 16 years while voting is 18 years. However in villages a child is defined by when they start their menstruation periods.

I thank you