



REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT

On

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL
BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOSAFETY POLICY**

Presented

BY

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Mr Speaker,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a statement to the house. I wish to inform this August House on recent developments in the implementation of the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy, in the context of current and anticipated developments in Biotechnology.

Mr Speaker

Modern Biotechnology is one of the fields of science that has great potential for the socio-economic development of the nation, particularly in areas such as Agriculture, Health, Environment, and Industry. An aspect of modern Biotechnology that requires particular attention is the development of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). GMOs are created by transferring genetic materials from one organism to another. This process enables the organisms receiving the genes to perform new functions. In some cases, modern Biotechnology results in the production of improved products. However, development of GMOs has also attracted attention from various stakeholders. In particular, concerns have been expressed over the risks to human and animal health, and the environment.

Mr Speaker

In order to secure the benefits of modern Biotechnology while, at the same time, minimizing the risks to human and animal health, as well as the environment, Government resolved to put in place the legal and institutional framework to regulate the technology.

Thus, in 2003 Cabinet adopted the National Policy on Biotechnology and Biosafety. Parliament enacted the Biosafety Act No. 10 of 2007, to provide the legal environment for implementing the Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy. This Act, establishes the National Biosafety Authority (NBA), whose main mandate is to regulate all activities relating to Genetically Modified Organisms in Zambia. These activities include:

- (1) The importation of GMOs,
- (2) The export of GNOs,
- (3) Research and Development in GMOs,
- (4) Transit of GMOs,
- (5) The contained use of GMOs,
- (6) release or placing on the market of any Genetically Modified Organism, whether intended for release into the environment, for use as a pharmaceutical, for food, feed or processing.

The National Biosafety Authority, in conformity with the Biosafety Act No. 10 of 2007, guides the judicious use and regulation of modern Biotechnology aimed at minimizing risks to human and animal health and the environment, including our rich Biological diversity in general. The National Biosafety Authority is mandated to regulate and facilitate the safe application of Biotechnology for the benefit of the country while, at the same time, ensuring that the risks associated with modern technology are adequately managed.

Mr. Speaker

Honourable Members may recall that in 2002, Zambia experienced a severe drought which affected the Southern African Region. The drought threatened national food security in the country. Some of our cooperating partners offered relief food which was in form of genetically modified maize to avert the anticipated looming hunger crisis. The government at the time rejected the maize donation due to lack of adequate scientific information on the effects of GMOs.

Mr. Speaker

The Government decision to reject GMOs was also based on the fact that Zambia did not have the technical capacity to effectively handle GMOs and the products thereof.

Following this event, the Zambian Government has been working towards establishing Policy and Legal frameworks to regulate modern Biotechnology in the country. These frameworks include the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy of 2003 and the Biosafety Act No. 10 of 2007.

The framework provides for judicious application and use of modern Biotechnology for sustainable development of the nation with minimum risk to human and animal health, biodiversity, as well as the environment in general.

Through these measures the Zambian government ensures that the public and environment are protected from the potential risks that are associated with the use of modern Biotechnology, especially Genetically Modified Organisms. We recognise that modern Biotechnology has advanced worldwide and, as a nation, we cannot afford to ignore the benefits of this technology, while we are alert and prepared to deal with possible adverse risk.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me hasten to say that the Ministry of Higher Education has not been working in isolation. There are various Stakeholders who have worked with the Ministry in the implementation of our National Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy. We are working with the Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock, Health, Environment, Local Government and Commerce, Trade, and Industry.

We also work with research institution such as the University of Zambia, the National Institute for Scientific and Industrial Research, Cotton Trust, and Zambia Agriculture Research Institute. Further, we work with Cooperating Partners, such as the Global Environmental Fund, The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

We also collaborate with the Civil Society Organizations and the Farmers who are important stakeholders in Biosafety and Biotechnology.

Mr. Speaker

As I have illustrated, my Ministry is now on a clear path for the development of Biotechnology for the benefit of the country. It is our intention, however, that the application of this new technology is conducted under a regulated environment, which safeguards human, and animal health, as well as the environment.

I THANK YOU MR. SPEAKER