

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON THE

### **CONCERNS RAISED BY HON. JACK MWIIMBU THROUGH A POINT OF ORDER RELATING TO THE SLOW PACE OF REGISTRATION OF VOTERS BY THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF ZAMBIA (ECZ)**

BY

**HER HONOUR THE VICE-PRESIDENT**

Mr Speaker, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to respond to the point of order raised by Hon. Jack Mwiimbu on the concerns relating to the slow pace of registration of voters by the **Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ). In accordance with Article 229 2(c) of the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act, No.2 of 2016 and Section 7 of the Electoral Process Act, N0.35 of 2016, The ECZ is mandated to register voters.**

Mr Speaker, in view of this constitutional and statutory mandate, the commission commenced the process of registration of voters on Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2020. The process of registration of voters is expected to run for a period of thirty days, from 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2020 to 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2020. During this period, the commission has targeted to register a total number of 9 million voters.

Sir, since the exercise commenced, the commission has received an overwhelming response from eligible citizens turning up to register as voters. This is indeed, commendable of all Zambians.

Mr Speaker, in order to achieve the intended target, the commission has taken into account the concerns raised by the general public on the ongoing voter registration exercise, including the

issue raised on the point of order by Hon. Jack Mwiimbu on the slow pace of registration of voters. The commission has taken the following actions to address the public concerns.

#### *Duration of Registration and Slow Pace of Registration of Voters*

Mr Speaker, the commission is grateful that members of the public have come out in numbers to register as voters. The commission has therefore, started deploying additional staff and registration kits to the registration centres, which have recorded high numbers of people so that the voter registration exercise can be efficiently and expeditiously done. It must be noted that not all centres have recorded a high number of persons intending to register and it is for this reason that extra kits will be deployed to only those that have a huge turnout.

#### *Online Pre-Application*

Mr Speaker, in order to ensure that eligible citizens who have and may wish to use the online pre-application platform to submit their details spend less time at registration centres, the commission will be publishing designated collection centres, specifically for those who submitted their details online. It will be indicated at these centres that designated queues will be available for those who registered online. This will give them priority as the process will be quicker. Once those citizens who pre-registered are complete with the process, other members of the public can be attended to on those queues.

#### *Recruitment of Additional Staff*

Mr Speaker, as an immediate measure to address the congestion at registration centres, the commission has started deploying additional staff to supplement the registration process. This is intended to ensure that citizens applying to be registered as voters are processed quickly. Positive results of this are already being witnessed in other centres as has been reported in the media.

#### *Extension of Registration Hours*

Mr Speaker, the House may wish to know that the commission has extended the operational hours for selected registration centres from 0600 hours to 2200 hours. Further, all registration centres located at Civic Centres across the country and the ECZ Resource Centre in the Show Grounds will now operate on a 24 hours basis in order to capture as many eligible citizens who may not have an opportunity during the day. This measure will be complemented by the introduction of shifts for the registration officers so as to cure burnout levels among our officers.

Sir, I wish to remind the general public that a person wishing to register as a voter can register from any polling station countrywide even if it is not the polling station, where they will vote from in 2021. This allows for citizens who have travelled away from their designated voting polling stations to collect their voters' cards any day during this period.

#### *Persons with Disabilities, Expectant Mothers and the Elderly*

Mr Speaker, this august House may wish to note that it is the practice of the commission that persons with disability, the elderly and expectant mothers ought to be given priority during elections and in all the electoral services. Therefore, the commission has instructed all field officers to ensure that persons with disabilities, expectant mothers and the elderly people are assisted and taken to the front of the queues to be attended to promptly.

#### *Voter Registration Phases*

Mr Speaker, the commission is undertaking a countrywide Mobile Voter Registration Exercise which is divided into four phases. During these phases, the registration officers will move within a ward at intervals of at least seven days so as to capture eligible citizens from within their catchment area. The intention of the commission is to cover all the 8,999 registration centres to ensure that every registration centre is catered for within the thirty days period. Therefore, not all registration centres will be open at the same time in each phase. However, registration centres will open according to the allocated phases. This then means that a registration centre that may not be open in the current Phase I will open in subsequent phases.

Sir, the commission has shared the deployment plan for voter registration officers with the general public through the 116 councils and the print media. In addition, one can be accessed by visiting the commission's website. In addition, the commission voter education facilitators are making public announcements in communities as to which registration centres are open. Notwithstanding the foregoing, I wish to further state that the commission has also stationed registration centres in all the 116 district centres and the ECZ Resource Centre in the Show Grounds here in Lusaka. These registration centres are positioned in such a way that people do not have to travel distances to register as voters.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, my Government has and will always be committed to adhering to our electoral processes. We are further committed to ensuring all processes relating to voter registration until voting are conducted in a free and fair manner that all citizens are given an opportunity to exercise their right to vote and that the electoral process is conducted in an efficient manner. It is for this reason that the ECZ has taken further steps at ensuring that the initial teething problems are dealt with in the shortest possible time by putting into place mechanisms to enable all eligible citizens, who wish to register as voters.

Sir, my appeal to all eligible voters and the general public is that we need to have confidence in the ECZ that it is carrying out the exercise in accordance with its mandate and that indeed, the ECZ is taking this process very seriously for the good of the nation. Let us refrain from all negative comments both on social media as well as the print or electronic media, which may lead to unnecessary violence during the entire period.

With these few remarks, I thank you, Mr Speaker.