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Republic of Zambia

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE INTERRUPTION OF SERVICE TO 204 UNIVERSAL ACCESS GSM COMMUNICATION TOWERS IN CHIEFDOMS

Presented to the House by
Honourable Kapembwa Simbao, MP
Minister of Transport and Communications

November, 2015

Mr. Speaker

I wish to thank you most sincerely for affording me an opportunity to make a Ministerial Statement on the interruption of mobile communication service on the 204 communications towers constructed under phase I targeting Chiefdoms.

Mr. Speaker

Government in 2012 embarked on a programme to construct GSM mobile communication towers in areas that have remained underserved or unserved since the inception of GSM service in Zambia using funds from the Universal Access and Service Fund (UASF) administered by the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA).

The 204 sites are serviced by satellite communications for transmission backhaul provided by an international satellite communications provider, Spacecom. Spacecom under this particular satellite which is called "AMOS-5" is serving central and southern African countries which include Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa.

On Monday, 23rd November 2015, we received a report through ZICTA from Spacecom that an unprecedented major fault occurred on the orbital satellite, AMOS-5.

AMOS-5 is dysfunctional following a fault. Simply stated this means the network to all the 204 GSM sites in Zambia is down. However the problem is affecting the entire Central and Southern Region of Africa that are served by AMOS-5.

Mr. Speaker

In the immediate term and to ensure that communication is restored as soon as possible, Government through ZICTA has engaged Spacecom with a view to migrate the traffic for the 204 GSM sites to an alternative satellite which operates in the same frequency band as AMOS-5.

Prior to the failure of AMOS-5 orbital satellite, ZICTA through Huawei Technologies Ltd (who is the project contractor) had commenced to resolve problems affecting 36 sites which were not in service out of the 204. As at November 30, 2015 Huawei had been to 12 sites to resolve the problems. However, it must be noted that availability of service to these sites and all the other sites is pending resolution of the satellite problem alluded to earlier.

Mr. Speaker

This proposal will require reconfiguration of the equipment and realignment of the antenna of the hub station in Lusaka and later of each one of the 204 sites across the country. It is anticipated that normal service will be restored to all the sites within 30 days.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS ARISING FROM THE ISSUANCE OF THE MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Question 1: How much will Government spend to fix the problem concerning the satellite interruption?

Response: The cost of service restoration will be covered by the Satellite service provider, Spacecom.

Question 2: The challenges of communication towers constructed under phase I

Response: ZICTA has started engaging with Mobile Network Operators to compel them to start maintaining their active equipment mounted on the towers to minimize service disruptions

Question 3: Specific question from individual Honourable Members of Parliament on whether their constituencies have been adequately covered? Unfair distribution of towers in provinces.

Response: All the constituencies have been covered under Phase 2. The towers have been adequately distributed as per technical survey that was undertaken for Phase 2.

Question 4: The duration of project implementation in terms of the Start and end date including the total cost of the project (Concessional loan).

Response: The project has started in terms of tender processes. However construction of the first sites is earmarked for April 2016 and completion date will be December 2017 if there will be no challenges in terms of accessibility to the sites. The total cost of the project is estimated at US \$280,764,601.55 Million through a concessional loan.

Question 5: Which contractor has been identified to execute the project having in mind that the previous contractor (Huawei) who implemented phase I underperformed?

Response: The contractor will be Huawei who intend to source for funds through vendor financing

Question 6: Why has Phase 2 been given to Zamtel instead of the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority? Furthermore, are MTN and Airtel participating in phase 2.

Response: Government has given Phase 2 to Zamtel because it is using borrowed funds to construct the towers.

Zamtel is also strategically placed to own, manage and maintain the 469 towers. MTN and Airtel will participate through co-locating on the towers by paying a fee to Zamtel

Question 7: When will Government introduce a fourth mobile operator on the market?

Response: Government is still consulting on the introduction of a fourth mobile operator.

Question 8: What is the arrangement for payment of rental charges on land where communication towers will be constructed?

Response: Government has ensured that most of these towers that will be constructed under phase 2 are located either at a school or clinic in order to avoid payment of rental charges. My Ministry has since written to the Ministers responsible for these sites to initiate the process of land acquisition.