



COMMONWEALTH SPECIAL ENVOY TO ZAMBIA
Prof. Ibrahim Gambari

Press Statement by Prof Ibrahim Gambari, Commonwealth Special Envoy to Zambia following first visit to Zambia

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Following my appointment by Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, as her Special Envoy to Zambia, I arrived in Lusaka on 7 September to hold initial consultations on my assignment. The overarching objective of my engagement is to promote an inclusive, nationally-owned, forward-looking political dialogue process that would assist: addressing issues of concern to political stakeholders, reducing political tension and violence, creating an environment that would promote and uphold tolerance and civility, facilitating a roadmap on governance reforms and enhancing political and social cohesion in the country ahead of future elections.

Given the importance of the ownership of this process by Zambians, the main objectives of my first visit as Special Envoy were: to meet a broad range of stakeholders to find out what issues were on the minds of Zambians, to seek views on who should be part of this dialogue, and to discuss how the dialogue process should be structured to address these issues.

Since my arrival, I have held extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including HE President Edgar Lungu, Mr Hakainde Hilchilema, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Electoral Commission of Zambia, the Chief Justice, the Attorney General, the Inspector General of Police, the representatives of political parties, the church mother bodies, the House of Chiefs, the Zambia Centre for Interparty Dialogue and several other civil society organisations comprising of women's, governance, youth, media groups, Commonwealth High Commissioners, the European Union and other development partners from the diplomatic community. I also met and spoke to some elder statesmen. I wish to indicate here that due to time constraints, I could not meet with all the stakeholders I would have loved to meet during this visit. I will endeavour to meet with as many of them as possible during my next and subsequent visits.

The key issues that were communicated to me can be broadly categorised under four main headings, namely **Constitutional Reforms, Institutional Reform/Challenges, Electoral Reform and the need to institutionalise a culture of dialogue, tolerance, civility and respect for basic freedoms.**

In terms of who should participate in the process, feedback from our consultations indicate that the dialogue should be inclusive and should involve a broad range of stakeholders including political parties, key national institutions such as the Presidency, the Electoral Commission, the police, the judiciary, civil society, the House of Chiefs, religious bodies, the media, academia, elder statespersons, the youth and women.

The methodology for the dialogue will be guided by the principles of national ownership (Zambian-led), sustainability, continued and firm commitment of political leaders, mutual respect, and the adoption of clear, time-bound, measurable achievement of tangible results.

A national mechanism comprising representatives from organisations or institutions covering the spectrum of the areas mentioned above would be established through further consultations to help provide a platform for the dialogue. This group, chaired by the Special Envoy, will also be responsible for discussing and agreeing the agenda for the roadmap as well as the rules and procedures of the Dialogue. The Group will negotiate and agree a timetable to determine the frequency and regularity of plenary meetings and sustained engagement towards the completion of the Dialogue in the envisaged timeframe. Through consultations, the Special Envoy will propose the timing and sequencing of meetings as may be appropriate.

The Group will also oversee/monitor progress and implementation of outcomes. While I will be visiting regularly as appropriate, the national mechanism which will be steered locally will coordinate necessary activities between my visits. It is envisioned that the national mechanism will receive support from a long-term expert supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat on the ground in Zambia. I expect to outline a comprehensive strategy during my next visit.

The road ahead is going to be long, sometimes bumpy and full of challenges but I want to urge political leaders and other stakeholders to remain focused, committed and supportive of an environment that would help foster a constructive, results-driven dialogue process. Like every peace initiative, there shall be distractions, but I wish to remind everyone to remain focused on our overarching objectives.

I would like to encourage the media to act with professionalism and help promote an environment conducive to this dialogue process. The media are a key partner to this process and reporting should distinguish fact from opinion.

God bless Zambia, God bless Africa!