

**Pre-Election Day Press Conference
Commonwealth Special Adviser on Political Dialogue
Prof Ibrahim A. Gambari**

**Headquarters, Electoral Commission of Zambia, Lusaka
10 August 2016**

Chairperson, Hon. Justice E.E. Chulu and Commissioners of
the Electoral Commission of Zambia,
Director-ECZ,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking you for coming to this press conference on the eve of very crucial general elections in which the Zambian electorate will be voting to elect the President of the Republic, Members of Parliament, municipal council authorities and mayors, as well as voting in a referendum on the Bill of Rights.

I bring you strong words of encouragement, solidarity and unflinching support from the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC.

As you are aware, in consultation with the Electoral Commission of Zambia, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth appointed me as the Commonwealth Special Adviser on Political Dialogue in June this year. My role has been to support the ECZ's efforts towards encouraging an environment conducive for the upcoming electoral processes.

My appointment was informed by the increasing electoral and political tensions - and sometimes unprecedented electoral violence - that we have witnessed in Zambia ahead of these

polls. The ECZ, political parties, civil society organisations, the international community and the Commonwealth Secretariat saw merit in supporting the ECZ and Zambians' efforts to conduct peaceful elections. So my role, which is essentially preventive and peacebuilding in an electoral context, is different from that of election observers, though complementary to an extent.

I undertook my first visit to Zambia in this role on 10 July and have since visited Zambia three times. In my visits, working with the ECZ's support, I have met separately (and in some cases severally) with a wide range of stakeholders including the Republican President, various party Presidents and presidential candidates, government officials, the Inspector General of police, representatives of civil society organisations, media agencies, First President of Zambia and other elder statesmen and senior officials of various political parties, member of the Commonwealth diplomatic community, European Union Ambassadors, the Ambassador of the United States, and the United Nations Resident Coordinator, among others. I have also attended and spoke in several ECZ-organised public events including the presentation of the findings of the independent audit on 13 July and the signing of the Peace Pledge on 15 July. I also attended yesterday's launch of the Election Results Centre as well as a tour of the Server Room organised by the ECZ on Monday 8 August for political party agents as a confidence building measure to help demystify the Room.

From a conflict prevention perspective, all stakeholders I have met are of the view that tensions and the incidence of election and campaign-related violence have been a major source of concern. Violent clashes, mainly between the PF and the UPND party cadres, have unfortunately led to deaths, maiming and loss of property. Injuring another fellow citizen or destroying

property, let alone causing the death of a brother or sister over politics and competition for service to the nation is highly regrettable.

A key observation I quickly made was the level of polarisation, lack of trust and confidence and the lack of constructive face-to-face dialogue among and between political contenders. Hence, the contestants for political offices have largely been talking at rather than talking to each other.

All stakeholders must put their hands on deck to ensure that these elections are peaceful and credible. Ensuring peaceful and credible elections is not the sole responsibility of the election management body. It is a nation's shared responsibility that involves the electoral commission, political leaders, elder statesmen, national institutions like the police and the judiciary, political parties, civil society, the media, opinion leaders and traditional structures and the population. These electoral processes can be supported by the international community but international stakeholders cannot substitute for the national players. In this regard, international partners can only be "actors in a supporting role."

I accepted this assignment when the Secretary-General requested me because of the special place Zambia, which I consider home, occupies in my soul as a son of Africa. Zambia's role in the liberation of Africa and its contribution to peace efforts on the continent make it a very precious gem we must preserve at all costs!

My first ever visit to this lovely country was as Foreign Minister of my country, Nigeria, in 1984 in the context of efforts to support the Frontline States. In fact, it is here in Lusaka that I

first met with Oliver Tambo when he found a home away from home here under Apartheid South Africa.

The sacrifices this country made to end minority rule in the region and in promoting peace on the continent have been immense. For example, the Lusaka Protocol signed here in 1994, played a key role in ending the civil war in Angola. Similarly, Zambia has been instrumental in promoting peace in neighbouring DRC.

Zambia also occupies a very special place within the Commonwealth as the famous Lusaka Declaration - a seminal document condemning Racism, Racial Prejudice, Discrimination and Inequality - was signed right here in Lusaka by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1979 at a meeting hosted by Zambia. This was part of all the efforts that culminated in the independence of Zimbabwe and ultimately South Africa.

In addition to the aforementioned efforts, the people of Zambia have been known for generally organising peaceful and successful elections. In fact, Zambia has been known as a role model and an island of peace in this sub-region, in Africa and even globally. This, in essence, is the image we are risk compromising and possibly destroying.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters, fellow Zambians, on the eve of these important polls, I entreat you all, especially political actors, not to go down in history as those responsible for casting Zambia's nationhood into jeopardy.

Public office is principally an opportunity to serve the people and therefore, competition to acquire or retain it should not be a do-or-die matter. It is about what one can contribute to

his or her country and nation. Under such an understanding, there is no reason why a fellow brother or sister should attempt to injure and/or kill another, let alone attempting to compromise the country's legacy, livelihoods and future. You cannot afford to drop the ball.

Having served as United Nations Under-Secretary-General and envoy to many parts of the world, including especially fragile and conflict afflicted countries, I have seen the devastation that violence, which is most often incited and stoked up by politicians, can cause to an entire generation. We cannot let our dear Zambia - one Zambia, one Nation - go down that road.

Remember, violence is an uncontrollable monster: it is not a turnkey operation which can just be switched off after it is turned on. Do not let posterity, the world, national and international judicial instances and - above all - your people judge you as that person who has their blood on his/her hands.

National interest should prevail over any personal ambition pursuits. Remember that there shall surely be a Zambia after these elections. Political leadership is transient and the current political actors, both ruling party and opposition, will one day be gone. An important question is how they would want to be remembered.

Politicians should commit to speaking to each other and not at each other. There can only be one winner in an election but with mutual respect, graciousness and statesmanship, there is less vile, pain and vindictiveness in victory or defeat.

I therefore encourage politicians and their followers to be responsible with the language they use against their opponents. Provocative, inciting and inflammatory messages are dangerous

and detrimental to peace and eventual reconciliation. Let the people of Zambia be the true winners of these elections. Also, the leaders should remember that whoever wins will eventually need the other.

The people of Zambia have a common destiny no matter their political party affiliation, tribe or region. Stand united against violence and manipulation to harm one another. Your diversity is an immense source of power and wealth. Dissociate from, and strongly denounce those who incite violence and threaten this beautiful country's national unity and thereby undermine the peace and security which are essential to socio-economic development. There would not be significant domestic and foreign direct investment in an atmosphere of chaos and confusion.

Let me conclude by observing that the people of Zambia have clearly spoken of their desire for peace and disdain for violence. Through different initiatives held via the ECZ, the churches, civil society organisations, national and international stakeholders, the messages against violence before, during and after the elections have been unequivocal. This voice and wishes of the people must be respected.

I would encourage all the political contenders to ensure that demands for transparency, accountability and/or petitions are made through relevant democratic channels. Verified election results should be accepted by the candidates and complaints and petitions should be pursued through legal and constitutional avenues and processes.

As mentioned earlier, violence destroys countries, scares investors and negatively affects our families and the future of especially our children, the youth and women.

The people of Africa and the global community need the light of peace and democracy in Zambia to continue shining. Zambia should not be allowed to lose its status as a home of peace to become another statistic that would compromise the country's status as a role model in Africa and beyond.

I wish you well as you go to the polls tomorrow and pray that you use this opportunity to continue to make Zambia, Africa and the Commonwealth of Nations proud. The world's eyes are on you!

My President, HE President Buhari, has also asked me to deliver a special message to President Lungu and has also expressed solidarity with the people of Zambia as they go for this important election, while encouraging candidates to prioritise peace before, during and after the polls .

God's blessings as you exercise your constitutional and democratic rights.

Long live Zambia, long live Africa!