

PRESS STATEMENT

THE SITUATION OF THE RIGHT TO FOOD IN ZAMBIA AMIDIST DROUGHTS

Date: 06th March 2024

Zambia like many other countries is experiencing El-nino weather conditions, and this has caused droughts in rainfall in most parts of the country. This has resulted into severe consequences for the farmers and people living in rural areas, it also threatens the livelihood of urban communities. It is estimated that one Million hectares of crops including maize have been lost due to this drought, and there is also a threat on livestock and wildlife due to lack of adequate pasture and water.

President Hakainde Hichilema of the Republic of Zambia on thursday, February 29, 2024 declared the current prolonged droughts in Zambia as a national disaster and emergency.

The highlighted short-term measures by the President lack strategies on how the agriculture sector will transform to respond to the crisis. In the next 6 months farmers will resume to farming activities and there is need for government to address what strategies will be used to ensure that any prolonged droughts will be mitigated. While it is recommended to support irrigation this might not provide solutions in a short term.

We therefore call upon government as short term measures to support farmers to grow sorghum, millets, cassava sweet potatoes so that people have food. Government must support diversification away from promoting maize at the expense of other crops. Experience amidst this drought has shown that farmers who planted millets and sorghum will manage to harvest as compared to farmers who only planted maize.

We call upon the government that the 2024-2025 Farmer Input Support programme and Food Security Pack (FSP) should not be done like the previous ones. People should be given crops which are able to withstand the current weather patterns. There is no need for Government to go ahead with FISP in its current form. Human life must be safe guarded and people should be supported to plant crops which will survive the current climatic conditions.

We call upon government to restructure the 2024 national budget so that it responds to the needs of millions of people who are exposed to hunger.

We call upon Government to promote agroecology; agroecology emerges as a key solution to the current climatic conditions.

Food Reserve Agency's (FRA) must be restructured to include purchase of millets, sorghum, and cassava as a way of mitigating the impact of drought and ensure that people have access to food (mealie meal).

By actively promoting these crops and incorporating them into relief programs or public procurement initiatives, the government can stimulate demand for locally produced food. This not only supports local farmers but also strengthens local food systems and economies.

We call upon Government to increase the number of people on social cash transfer to include the number of people who have been made vulnerable by the current crisis. Further the amounts on the social cash transfer must be increased to accommodate the growing high cost of living.

Access to basic universal social protection is a human right that is recognized in articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It requires that all people have access to adequate benefits to meet their basic needs, including with respect to food. In its general comment No. 19 (2007), the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasizes that social security systems contribute to the reduction and alleviation of poverty and inequality.

We applaud government for announcing the provision of food relief to communities affected by the prolonged drought, Non- Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) maize. International legal frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), emphasize the right of individuals to access safe and adequate food.

Furthermore, we emphasize the need for more investment in the early warning information system for quick and timely weather information dissemination. This will enhance the weather communication information by the Zambia Meteorological Department of the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment to all sectors. People must be given sufficient information so that they make good decisions.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has recognized that integrating climate adaptation measures into social protection increases climate resilience and has strong food security co-benefits. By promoting economic security and autonomy, including in times of climate and other crises, social security also reduces the need for emergency assistance.

Signatories:

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People's Process on Housing and Poverty in Zambia (PPHPZ)
Zambia Alliance of Women (ZAW)
Organic producers Association of Zambia (OPAZ)
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