



Republic of Zambia

STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY,
MRS. JOYCE NONDE-SIMUKOKO, M.P. DURING THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR
ORGANIZATION (ILO) AFRICAN REGIONAL VIRTUAL MEETING ON COVID-19 CRISIS
IN AFRICA: BUILDING BACK BETTER.

2 July 2020

Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to express my sincere gratitude for this opportunity to make a statement during this important occasion, the “International Labour Organization African Regional Virtual Meeting on COVID-19 Crisis in Africa held under the theme: “*Building Back Better.*” As we are all aware, the corona virus (COVID-19) has affected almost all spheres of life due to restrictive measures put in place by Governments. These measures have long lasting implications on the socio-economic lives of many people in the world including Zambia.

To contain the spread of the virus, our government has come up with the multi-sectoral national response plan to respond to impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. Notable measures implemented by Government include; Extension of Social Protection to Informal Sector, Protection and Supporting Enterprises, promoting compliance to national and International Labour Standards and promotion of Social Dialogue for solutions.

1. Support Enterprises, Jobs and Incomes for people.

The tourism sector was the first to be negatively impacted on by COVID-19, where the country recorded the highest number of job losses, due to the closure of airlines, hotels and lodges. Later, all sectors of the economy were negatively affected, leading to suspension of work in most enterprises.

In order to sustain SMEs, including those in the informal economy, the government has provided the 10 billion kwacha facility of which as of 25 June 2020 a total of K533m that is (\$29 million US Dollars) has been disbursed by the commercial banks. Other measure undertaken by the government to enhance economic stabilisation include the following:

- i. Issuance of the K8 billion COVID Bond that is (439 million US Dollars) as a stimulus package to enhance economic activities
- ii. Prioritization of payment of retirees and those on separatees payroll waiting for retirement benefits
- iii. Approved K30m (\$1.6 million US Dollars) Youth Empowerment Scheme under the Ministry of Tourism and Arts ¹.

¹ Special address to the Nation by the Republican President, Edgar Chagwa Lungu, 25 June 2020.

2. Promoting compliance to National and International Labour Standards.

In order to promote compliance to National and International Labour Standards that promote safe return to work, my Ministry is currently undertaking the following;

- i. Development of a Return to Work Programme - Post COVID-19 aimed at ensuring that workers operate in environments that are safe and healthy for productive work. My Ministry is developing guidelines to guide and standardise how the return to work will be operationalised in workplaces, in line with the set national Occupational, Safety and Health (OSH) policies and guidelines.
- ii. Enhanced inspections to improve adherence to Occupational Safety and Health legislation in view of COVID-19. My Ministry is in collaboration with other national stakeholders is devising modalities to strengthen the labour inspections capacity especially in districts where the Ministry of Labour is non-resident, this is being done by involving partners institutions such as; National Pension Scheme Authority, Workers Compensation Fund Control Board, immigration, and social partners to complement the work of the Ministry

3. Promotion and utilization of Social Dialogue for Solutions.

Government and social partners should work together to enhance effective labour administration especially in the wake of COVID 19. With support from the ILO, the Ministry convened Two Special Tripartite Consultative Labour Council Meetings (TCLCs). The Meetings were held to review the state of affairs on the labour market and consider mitigating measures to regulate employment and labour market relationships in the wake of COVID-19.

Zambia's Post COVID-19 Interventions

The post Covid 19 era should compel enterprises to adopt new forms of work, inclusive of work from home and tele-working arrangements. This change will however encounter new challenges such as work-life disruptions, internet connectivity limitations, and limited ICT skills among employees.

Employers therefore should be supported to facilitate training investments for their workers. Additional Employer investments are also required to ensure adherence to COVID-19 related health and safety guidelines, inclusive of the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). There is therefore a need to re-consider the duty of care, and explore how these health and safety costs can

be cushioned underpinned by social justice crafted around decent work principles and enhanced social dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I therefore wish to conclude by reiterating the opportunities presented by this pandemic in enabling the continent to re-evaluate commitments made through the Abidjan Declaration (2019) towards realizing the potential for a future of work with social justice. This pandemic calls for renewed and collective vigour to safeguard improvements made in economic growth, reduction of poverty through promotion of decent work. We therefore need to respond to the new challenges and we must act now.

Together we will win this battle!

I thank you.