



MESSAGE FROM

**HIS EXCELLENCY, DR EDGAR CHAGWA LUNGU,
PRESIDENT OF REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA**

ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

SATURDAY, 2ND MAY, 2020

STATE HOUSE

TOMORROW, 3RD MAY, 2020, JOURNALISTS COMMEMORATE WORLD PRESS FREEDOM - A DAY WHEN THEY REFLECT ON THEIR PROFESSION. I, THEREFORE, WISH TO APPLAUD YOU, ZAMBIAN JOURNALISTS, ON THIS SPECIAL DAY FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO DUTY IN INFORMING, EDUCATING AND ENTERTAINING MASSES AS WE WORK TOGETHER TO DEVELOP OUR COUNTRY.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, I WOULD LIKE TO PRAISE YOU FOR YOUR COMMITMENT TO DUTY AS YOU CONTINUE TO INFORM AND EDUCATE MASSES DURING THIS DIFFICULT TIME AS WE, AS A COUNTRY, AND THE WHOLE WORLD, FIGHT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

YOU ARE FRONTLINE WORKERS, AS LONG AS YOU CONTINUE INFORMING THE COUNTRY ABOUT THE PANDEMIC BECAUSE YOU CANNOT REPORT FROM HOME, YOU HAVE TO GO OUT, AND MAY COME INTO HARM'S WAY.

YOU ARE VERY CRITICAL IN THIS FIGHT BECAUSE, YOUR ACCURATE REPORTING AND ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION WE ARE IN, IS KEY IN UNITING ALL OF US AS WE FIGHT THE COVID-19. I MUST SAY SO FAR, THE COVERAGE HAS BEEN FAIR AS YOU HAVE FOCUSSED MORE ON OFFICIAL INFORMATION. MORE IMPORTANTLY, YOU HAVE EDUCATED AND SENSITISED MASSES ADEQUATELY ABOUT HOW TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS.

MEMBERS OF THE PRESS,

I AM GLAD TO STATE THAT THE PATRIOTIC FRONT GOVERNMENT HAS INVESTED MASSIVELY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDIA WITH THE MIGRATION FROM ANALOGUE TO DIGITAL BROADCASTING STANDING OUT IN THE QUEST TO DEVELOP THE MEDIA IN ZAMBIA.

THE DIGITISATION OF THE MEDIA IN ZAMBIA HAS GIVEN WAY TO THE PLURALITY OF MEDIA CHANNELS. CONVERSELY, THE OPERATIONALISATION OF THE INDEPENDENT BROADCASTING AUTHORITY HAS BEEN A MILESTONE THAT HAS SEEN THE LICENSING OF OVER A HUNDRED BROADCASTING HOUSES IN ZAMBIA.

CURRENTLY, THERE ARE 39 LICENSED TELEVISION COMPANIES, AND 134 RADIO STATIONS. THIS DEVELOPMENT HAS NOT JUST SEEN THE EMPLOYMENT OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THESE COMPANIES, BUT HAS SEEN THE PLURALITY OF VOICES IN THE MEDIA AND THE MEDIA HAS BECOME A REAL MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS. WE HAVE ALSO WITNESSED QUALITY PICTURE AND SOUND BECAUSE OF THE DIGITISATION OF BROADCASTING.

MEMBERS OF THE PRESS,

THE MULTIPLICATION OF TELEVISION CHANNELS HAS EQUALLY SEEN A PLETHORA OF CHALLENGES. THESE ARE:

UNETHICAL JOURNALISM - THE COUNTRY HAS SEEN A DETERIORATION OF ETHICAL JOURNALISM, AND THIS IS, PARTLY, AS A RESULT OF THE NEW MEDIA COMPANIES HIRING UNTRAINED PERSONNEL TO RUN NEWSROOMS. BROADCASTING IS A VERY DELICATE MEDIA AND IF MISHANDLED, WORDS SAID ON TELEVISION AND RADIO COULD PLUNGE A COUNTRY INTO CIVIL STRIFE.

WE HAVE WITNESSED MISQUOTING OF SOURCES, OMISSION OF INFORMATION TO SUIT THE JOURNALIST'S AGENDA, EXAGGERATION OF EVENTS, AND DISTORTION OF INFORMATION.

IN NEWSPAPERS WE HAVE SEEN SAME SOURCES BEING QUOTED OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND THEIR AGENDAS DICTATING COVERAGE. CONVERSELY, WE HAVE SEEN NEWSPAPERS USING SUCH SOURCES TO FOSTER THEIR AGENDA. THE RECRUITMENT OF UNTRAINED STAFF IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE NEXT CHALLENGE:

SMALL MEDIA MARKET - MUCH AS THE MEDIA HAS EXPANDED IN THE COUNTRY, THE COMMERCIAL SIDE REMAINS TROUBLED AS A RESULT OF FEW COMPANIES READY TO GIVE THESE COMPANIES BUSINESS IN TERMS OF ADVERTISING. IT IS A FACT THAT THERE ARE VERY FEW COMPANIES WILLING TO ADVERTISE ON THESE MEDIA PLATFORMS. IT IS BECAUSE OF THIS CHALLENGE THAT MEDIA COMPANIES ARE UNABLE TO RAISE ENOUGH REVENUE TO EMPLOY TRAINED PERSONNEL. UNTRAINED JOURNALISTS THEN DEMAND THAT THEIR SOURCES PAY THEM FOR COVERAGE. THIS, IN ITSELF, COMPROMISES THESE JOURNALISTS AS THEY CANNOT REPORT OBJECTIVELY. RELATED TO THIS CHALLENGE IS:

POLITICAL INFLUENCE - WE HAVE SEEN POLITICAL PLAYERS, TO A LARGER EXTENT INFLUENCE, WHAT IS PUT OUT BY SOME MEDIA ORGANISATIONS. THE NEWS AND PROGRAMMES OF THESE MEDIA ORGANISATIONS ARE SKEWED TOWARDS PROPAGATING THE AGENDA OF THEIR POLITICAL SPONSORS. THESE SPONSORED MEDIA ARE UTTERLY BIASED AND NO AMOUNT OF GOOD CAN BE WRITTEN ABOUT OTHER POLITICAL PLAYERS EVEN IF THEY DID ANYTHING POSITIVE.

THESE AND MANY OTHERS ARE THE CHALLENGES THE MEDIA FACES TODAY. MOST DISAPPOINTING IS THE FACT THAT THE MEDIA HAS TODATE FAILED TO COME UP WITH A MEDIA COUNCIL, A BODY THAT WOULD HAVE CLEANED UP UNPROFESSIONALISM IN THE MEDIA. FAILURE TO FORM THIS MEDIA BODY, COUPLED WITH THE ADVENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA, HAS MEANT PEOPLE FAILING TO DISTINGUISH A JOURNALIST FROM OTHER ORDINARY COMMUNICATORS. AND UNTIL JOURNALISTS REALISE THE IMPORTANCE OF A MEDIA COUNCIL, THEY WILL CONTINUE TO GRUMBLE AS SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISTS CONTINUE TO TAKE UP THEIR SPACE.

ON MY PART, I STILL REALISE THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM, WHOSE IMPORTANCE IS CLEARLY SEEN IN THIS COVID-19 FIGHT. AS I JOIN JOURNALISTS IN REMEMBERING THEIR DAY, I END BY ENCOURAGING THOSE MEDIA PRACTITIONERS WHO ARE UNTRAINED TO USE SOME OF THEIR TIME TO GO TO SCHOOL TO BUILD THEIR CAPACITY. IT IS NEVER LATE.

LONG LIVE PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM.