



# **Launch of the UNDP Project "Consolidation of the Electoral Process in Zambia: Support to the Electoral Cycle 2015-2017"**

*Intercontinental Hotel, Friday 4 March 2016*

## **Remarks by the UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Janet Rogan**

Honourable Justice Esau Chulu, Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Zambia and Commissioners of the Electoral Commission,  
Director of the Electoral Commission of Zambia, Priscilla Isaac  
EU Charge d'Affaires, Rune Skinnebach  
UK High Commissioner, Lucy Joyce  
Ambassador of Ireland, Seamus O' Grady  
Members of the Press  
Distinguished Guests

I am delighted to represent the UN in Zambia at today's official launch of the project for "**Consolidation of the Electoral Process in Zambia: Support to the Electoral Cycle 2015-2017**". This project is being undertaken by UNDP in support of the Electoral Commission of Zambia, with generous funding from the European Union, DFID UK, Irish Aid and UNDP itself. USD 7.7 million is being invested in this project which aims to make a significant further step in enhancing the quality of elections in Zambia.

Zambia has an established record globally for peaceful democratic transitions of government through multiparty elections. The Electoral Commission of Zambia has built a strong reputation in the region and, indeed, worldwide for the quality of the electoral process it provides in Zambia. The project we are launching officially today will support the Electoral Commission in further improving those areas it administers directly - such as voter education, auditing the voter registration database, ensuring the secure and timely transmission of results, and better communication on the electoral process.

This project will also support the Electoral Commission in very important issues relating to the electoral process that take place more widely in society. These include the way in which our media colleagues engage in and report on the electoral processes and campaigns, on election day itself, and on the results themselves. The project will also support training of the Zambian Police Service in effective rights-based policing throughout the electoral process, including the pre-campaign period, nominations, the campaigns, election day and the results.

As indicated in the title of the project (2015-2017), work will continue after the general elections on longer term issues including decentralisation of the Electoral Commission, improving the linkages between the voter registration database and the civil register, and so forth. The project will also support the Electoral Commission's review of the processes of these general elections and consider what further improvements might be made in the future.

So far this year in preparations for the general elections, we have seen an outstanding response to the **Voter Registration** exercise undertaken by the Electoral Commission with around 1.6 million new voters registered, around 93% of those eligible, which is an excellent result. Over half of these are women; and almost all of the newly registered voters are young people. This excellent response to the voter registration exercise shows that young people, and particularly the women among them, want to participate in the elections. I hope that they will also turn out on election day to make their voices heard and exercise their right to vote.

The general elections in Zambia will mark another historic progression in Zambia's peaceful democratic and constitutional development. The new Constitution makes significant improvements in democratic accountability. The 50% + 1 requirement for the presidential election and the introduction of the presidential running mate is one such progressive improvement.

Another relates to the role of the judiciary. The judiciary plays a sensitive mediation role in elections, including through adjudication of cases related to electoral petitions, and it must be able to perform this role with impartiality and independence. In the case of any dispute relating to the election of the president,

the Constitution introduces a new Constitutional Court with power to adjudicate such issues. UNDP will also be supporting the judiciary in the establishment of the new Constitutional Court before the general elections take place.

The new Constitution also brings in the new requirement for a Grade 12 certificate to be eligible to stand for election at any level. This is a very progressive element. It can also be read alongside another progressive change in the Constitution, which is that for district and mayoral elections there is no requirement to be certified as a candidate by a political party. These two changes, taken together, are a new opportunity for young people, and women in particular, to step forward as candidates.

Zambia is frequently held up as an example of an open and democratic society, which has been peaceful and stable for the 51 years since Independence. A persecuted author who for many years feared for his life (*Salman Rushdie*) said that "two things form the bedrock of any open society - freedom of expression and rule of law. If you don't have those things, you don't have a free country." Here in Zambia, the Public Order Act plays a central part, which is of particular sensitivity during an election year. I understand that the Ministry of Home Affairs is leading consultations on this and hope to amend the Act in this legislative session of the National Assembly. Speedy revision of the Public Order Act would be welcome. However, in the meantime, it is important to consider how even the current Public Order Act can be used to protect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, as well as good order and public safety. There is a balance to be struck that is not there at the moment and that is a serious concern.

The Zambian Police Service have a responsibility to ensure that they apply the Public Order Act in a fair and impartial way, in all provinces of the country, treating all political parties equally. In an election, the governing party is competing the same as all other parties and should be treated the same way during the campaign period. All political parties have the responsibility to make utmost efforts to organise their party and campaigning activities with the maximum regard for public safety. All parties, government and opposition, should avoid organising major events on the same day in the same location. All

parties should avoid organising large scale gatherings in public places without due regard to the safety of citizens going about their daily business. All parties should cooperate with the police to enable campaigning and debate of issues to take place in safety. The Police Service should, to the greatest extent possible, enable and facilitate peaceful political and campaigning activities for all parties.

Violence has no place in politics or in elections, in Zambia or anywhere else. No political party should tolerate its members, supporters or cadres engaging in violence or intimidation before, during or after elections. Leaders of political parties must ensure that their people do not indulge in such behaviour and the Police Service needs to act swiftly if they do. Paramilitary regalia, aggressive organised behaviour that threatens the common peace, and mass hooliganism cannot be allowed to take the place of debate on the real issues that are of concern to voters across the country. Today I call upon the Zambian Police Service and the leadership of all political parties to come together to ensure that there are clear and workable modalities to enable peaceful political activities and campaigning to take place and to prevent violence, intimidation and conflict from arising on our streets.

The Electoral Commission, under the experienced leadership of Justice Chulu, bears the weighty responsibility of overseeing and conducting these general elections for and on behalf of the people of Zambia. It is an honour to support the Electoral Commissioners and the staff of the Electoral Commission as they undertake this important work. The project we are officially launching today is evidence of the great support for the Electoral Commission and for the electoral process in Zambia, from the UN and from the generous cooperating partners represented at very senior levels here today. We will remain closely engaged in this endeavour with you, throughout the 2016 general election period and beyond.

Thank you.