

JUNE 16.

**DAY OF THE
AFRICAN CHILD**

PRESS STATEMENT

Thursday, 16th June 2022

Annually on June 16, the African Child is celebrated by reflecting on the strides made in creating a world that is just and conducive for all children to develop to their fullest potential and contribute to Africa's development agenda.

This year, the African Child is being celebrated under the theme **"Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children: Progress on Policy & Practice since 2013"**. This is a call to take a step back and reflect on the policy actions that hinge on the fulfilment of the rights of the child. Zambia has made tremendous strides in advancing the protection of children from harmful practices particularly those perpetrated by traditional norms and values; yet more remains to be done. Harmful practices such as child marriage, child labour, gender-based violence and child sexual abuse, neglect, child trafficking, exploitation, alcohol and substance abuse are still an imminent threat to the safety of children across the continent.

Zambia like many other African countries has ratified key international and regional human rights instruments about children, namely; the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 2008, and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention Against the Worst Forms of Child Labour**, among others. To make this more effective at the domestic level, there is need to reform the legal framework through harmonizing laws and policies that, in some instances, are at variance with international standards, thereby limiting progress in meeting international commitments. There are proposals to expand the Bill of Rights to enshrine economic, social, and cultural rights to strengthen protective measures against loopholes in statutory and customary law that perpetuate violations against children.

This day focuses attention on the barriers that impede access to quality education among African children which is an important prerequisite to inclusive development. The International Day of the African Child encourages Governments throughout the continent to provide quality education to all children. Stemming from the operationalisation of basic human rights treaties, free public education has been adopted in most parts of the world, Zambia inclusive. **Recently, Government strengthened its resolve in providing universal access to education through the expansion of the Free Education Policy to include secondary education and improve the quality of education while promoting equal opportunities for girls, learners with disabilities, and the vulnerable.**

In this regard, the Government has enhanced access to education through various programmes and policies such as the **Re-entry Policy and the Keeping Girls in School programme which has been upscaled from 28,964 to 43,520 beneficiaries in 2022.** In addition, the Home-grown School Feeding Programme does not only encourage school attendance, it is a source of one nutritious meal a day for children especially those from poor households faced with high levels of poverty and vulnerability. However, these programmes do not adequately respond to the needs of out-of-school children and those living on the street who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Similarly, **the expansion of the Constituency Development Fund to cater for the needs of the education sector and the provision of bursaries for learners from vulnerable households will contribute to the advancement of their wellbeing through education and skills development which are the cornerstone of sustainable and inclusive development.** Another key programme that is centred on improving the livelihood of children is the Social Cash Transfer Programme that has been scaled up to include more households that have children with disabilities.

The Government has also **developed policies such as the National Child Policy, Alternative Care Guidelines, the National Plan of Action on Ending Child Marriage, and the National Online Child Protection Strategy,** among others, to ensure a conducive environment for the well-being of children. However, there is need to strengthen the multi-sectoral approach in the implementation of an effective child protection system that supports the participation of children in national development programmes. In this vein, funding for child welfare and development programmes needs to be prioritised through increased budgetary allocations. In addition, there is need to improve access to up-to-date data on children through a centralized database and improve birth registration in order to inform child-sensitive policy. Finally, there is a need for Government to expedite the enactment of the Children's Code Bill.

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