



## **Press Statement: Call for Immediate Consultations on Constitutional Reforms**

### **For Immediate Release**

**Lusaka, May 31, 2024**

We, the undersigned concerned civil society organizations, urge the United Party for National Development (UPND) government to fulfil its promises on constitutional reforms, as outlined in their 2021 party manifesto. The UPND pledged to prioritize governance reforms, particularly the much-needed constitutional changes that Zambians have long awaited.

Since assuming office, President Hakainde Hichilema and other UPND leaders, including Justice Minister Mulambo Haimbe, have repeatedly emphasized their commitment to these reforms. However, a recent statement by Information Minister Cornelius Mweetwa, suggesting a lack of appetite to undertake such reforms before the 2026 general elections, have added to the already exiting uncertainty especially around constitutional reforms. We call on the government to present a united and official position as well as demonstrate genuine commitment to the promised reforms.

The UPND manifesto clearly states, "We will undertake a comprehensive review of the Constitution to address lacunas and inconsistencies that have hampered effective governance." This commitment was a cornerstone of the party's appeal to voters, who now expect action, not ambiguity.

The UPND Government has now been in power for close to three years. Our expectation has been that by now, the Government would have publicly called for extensive consultations on constitutional reform, proposed a road map for reform which would be subjected to stakeholder input and appropriated the necessary resources to finance the process.

A good constitution is of paramount importance as it benefits both duty bearers and rights holders. A people-driven constitution will ensure a balanced and fair governance framework. Such a constitution will promote accountability, transparency, and the protection of human rights, thus strengthening the foundation of our democracy.

Constitutional reforms are crucial for enhancing checks and balances, ensuring judicial independence, and safeguarding human rights. The inconsistencies in statements from UPND leadership undermine public confidence in the current government and delay critical governance improvements that Zambians have been longing for.

We call on the government to:

1. Clarify its Official Position: The UPND administration must provide a clear, consistent, and unified stance on the timeline and roadmap for constitutional reforms. This will eliminate confusion and assure citizens of the government's dedication to its manifesto promises.

2. **Initiate Immediate Consultations:** Begin comprehensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including legal experts, civil society representatives, and the general public, to lay the groundwork for the constitutional reform process.
3. **Engage the Public:** Ensure that the consultation process is transparent and inclusive, allowing for broad public participation and input. This will help to build consensus and ensure that the reforms reflect the will of the Zambian people.
4. **Prioritize Key Issues:** Focus on addressing critical areas such as electoral integrity, enhancing the separation of powers among the three wings of government, improving media freedoms, strengthening accountability mechanisms for public office holders and the protection of human rights. These and other areas are vital for restoring public trust and promoting effective governance.

Our organisations stand ready to support the government in this endeavour through our work, such as raising awareness on the reforms once they begin and providing civic education on the form and manner of the said reforms.

We urge all stakeholders to work collaboratively towards a reformed and strengthened constitutional framework for Zambia. The time for dialogue and consultation is now; the Zambian people deserve nothing less.

**Issued by: Laura Miti – Executive Director, Alliance for Community Action** for and on behalf of:

**Alliance for Community Action (ACA)**

**Centre for Young Leaders in Africa (CYLA)**

**Christian Churches Monitoring Group (CCMG)**

**GEARS Initiative Zambia**

**Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)**

**Transparency International – Zambia (TI-Z)**

**Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations (ZAFOD)**

**End of Statement**

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