

SPEECH DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA
MR. LEVY PATRICK MWANAWASA, SC, ON THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE INTER-GOVERNMENTAL
CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL PROTECTION HELD AT
FAIRMOUNT HOTEL - LIVINGSTONE

ON 21st MARCH, 2006

THE CHAIRPERSON,
THE COMMISSIONER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS OF THE
AFRICAN UNION,
HONOURABLE MINISTERS FROM ZAMBIA AND THE
AFRICAN REGION,
SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS,
YOUR EXCELLENCIES,
INVITED PARTICIPANTS,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

IT IS A GREAT HONOUR AND PLEASURE FOR ME TO OFFICIATE AT THIS IMPORTANT INTER-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL PROTECTION. FIRST AND FOREMOST I WISH TO WELCOME ALL THE PARTICIPANTS TO THE CONFERENCE, AND IN PARTICULAR I WISH ALL OUR VISITORS A HAPPY AND PRODUCTIVE STAY WHILE IN ZAMBIA.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, REPRESENTATIVES FROM A NUMBER OF OUR SISTER COUNTRIES IN AFRICA AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE GATHERED HERE IN LIVINGSTONE TO DISCUSS A RANGE OF MEASURES FOR PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE AND POOR IN OUR SOCIETIES. THE THEME FOR THIS CONFERENCE IS ENTITLED "**A TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 21st CENTURY**". THIS THEME IS INDEED MOST APPROPRIATE GIVEN THAT OUR CONTINENT AFRICA

HAS THE HIGHEST POVERTY LEVELS. ALL THE 32 LOW HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX COUNTRIES ARE IN AFRICA. MANY OF AFRICA'S 800 MILLION PEOPLE LIVE ON LESS THAN A DOLLAR A DAY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AFRICA'S BIGGEST CHALLENGE IS COMBATING POVERTY. THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION FOR AFRICA WHICH WAS INITIATED BY THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER MR. TONY BLAIR STATES THAT "AFRICAN POVERTY AND STAGNATION IS THE GREATEST TRAGEDY OF OUR TIME".

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MANY OF OUR COUNTRIES HAVE SET IN MOTION PROGRAMMES AIMED AT ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS) BY 2015. IF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS ARE ACHIEVED BY 2015, MORE THAN 500 MILLION PEOPLE WILL BE LIFTED OUT OF EXTREME POVERTY, WHILE MORE THAN 300 MILLION WILL NO LONGER BE SUBJECTED TO HUNGER. ATTAINMENT OF THE MDGS WILL MEAN SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR MORE THAN 350 MILLION PEOPLE AND BASIC SANITATION FOR ANOTHER 650 MILLION. WITH LESS THAN A DECADE REMAINING WE MUST ALL MOVE WITH A SENSE OF URGENCY TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE DISCUSSION ON SOCIAL PROTECTION IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. SENIOR POLICY MAKERS ARE PARTICIPATING IN THIS CONFERENCE TO IDENTIFY AND TAKE FORWARD IN A PRACTICAL FASHION THE POTENTIAL OF BASIC SOCIAL PROTECTION INSTRUMENTS, INCLUDING THE USE OF CASH TRANSFER METHODS. SPECIFICALLY

THE CONFERENCE WILL ENDEAVOUR TO EXAMINE PRACTICAL ISSUES CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CASH TRANSFER SCHEMES WITHIN AN OVERALL POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION PACKAGE. I NOTE THAT SENIOR OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR SOCIAL WELFARE AND FINANCE AS WELL AS PRACTITIONERS FROM EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA ARE HERE. THERE ARE ALSO REPRESENTATIVES FROM DONOR ORGANISATIONS AND THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS. I AM OPTIMISTIC THAT WITH SUCH A RICH MIX OF EXPERTISE THE CONFERENCE WILL PRODUCE GOOD RESOLUTIONS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, ONE OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS CONFERENCE IS TO SHARE EXPERIENCES ON SOCIAL PROTECTION IN OUR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES. AS THE CONFERENCE DELIBERATES ON THIS IMPORTANT POLICY ISSUE WE NEED TO ASK OURSELVES THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- WHY DO WE NEED SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES?
- WHAT ARE SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES?
- WHAT IS THE ROLE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION?
- WHAT ARE THE RIGHT SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES?

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS OR SAFETY NET PROGRAMMES AS SOME OF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL THEM, ARE FORMAL AND INFORMAL MEASURES THAT PROTECT PEOPLE FROM THE WORST EFFECTS OF LOW INCOME AND

POVERTY. THEREFORE SOCIAL PROTECTION IS CONCERNED WITH FORMAL PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE OR SUBSTITUTE FOR INCOME. SOME OF THE PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

CASH TRANSFERS

FOOD RELATED PROGRAMS

MICRO CREDIT

SUBSIDIES

LABOUR INTENSIVE PUBLIC WORKS

SCHOOL LUNCHESES

WAIVER ON ESSENTIAL SERVICES SUCH AS HEALTH OR EDUCATION.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MANY OF OUR COUNTRIES HAVE USED THESE INSTRUMENTS IN VARYING DEGREES. ALLOW ME TO MENTION THAT ZAMBIA HAS UNDERTAKEN BOTH FORMAL AND INFORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES

I KNOW THAT ALMOST EVERY COUNTRY IN AFRICA HAS INFORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS. THE EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM HAS FOR MANY GENERATIONS BEEN THE MAIN VEHICLE FOR PROVIDING SOCIAL SAFETY NETS. HOWEVER, IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHEREBY THE EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM IS BEING ERODED AND WEAKENED FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER, WE HAVE A STRONG CASE AS LEADERS AND TECHNOCRATS TO DESIGN GOOD SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IN ZAMBIA POVERTY LEVELS ARE ESTIMATED TO BE ALMOST 70% IN BOTH URBAN AND RURAL AREAS. THE HIGH PREVALENCE OF HIV/AIDS HAS FURTHER CONTRIBUTED TO VULNERABILITY OF THE POPULATION. WHEN MY ADMINISTRATION CAME TO POWER IN 2001 COMBATING POVERTY BECAME OUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY. MY ADMINISTRATION EMBARKED ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM TO FIGHT POVERTY. WE PUT IN PLACE THE POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPER (PRSP). THIS PROGRAM ENDED IN 2004.

I AM AWARE THAT A NUMBER OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES ARE IMPLEMENTING POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMS. *THERE ARE ALSO A* NUMBER OF COUNTRIES IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL TRANSFER PROGRAMMES. HOWEVER SOCIAL TRANSFER PROGRAMS STILL REMAIN AN UNDER-UTILISED POLICY OPTION IN A MAJORITY OF COUNTRIES. I BELIEVE ZAMBIA WAS PARTICULARLY CHOSEN TO HOST THIS CONFERENCE BECAUSE OF THE SUCCESS STORY THAT IS EMERGING FROM THE PILOT CASH TRANSFER SCHEME BEING IMPLEMENTED IN KALOMO DISTRICT. MONITORING INFORMATION FROM THE KALOMO PILOT CASH TRANSFER SCHEME INDICATES THAT FOR INSTANCE, THE HEALTH AND NUTRITION STATUS OF THE BENEFICIARIES HAS IMPROVED. IN TERMS OF EDUCATION, THE LEVEL OF ABSENTEEISM AMONG PUPILS HAS DROPPED. FURTHER MORE SOME OF THE HOUSEHOLDS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO INVEST THEIR MONEY BY BUYING SMALL LIVESTOCK SUCH AS GOATS AND CHICKENS.

TOMORROW DURING THE FIELD TRIP TO KALOMO YOU WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR FIRST HAND THE EXPERIENCES OF SOME OF THE BENEFICIARIES. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE SCHEME HOLDS A LOT OF PROMISE TO IMPROVE THE WELFARE OF THE POOR AND INCAPACITATED HOUSEHOLDS. THIS HAS ULTIMATELY LED TO THE GENERATION OF A LOT OF POSITIVE INTERNATIONAL INTEREST BOTH WITHIN AFRICA AND OUTSIDE AFRICA. MANY INSTITUTIONS REGARD THE CASH TRANSFER APPROACH TO BE A "BEST PRACTICE". FOR INSTANCE:

- THE COMMISSION FOR AFRICA REPORT (POPULARLY KNOWN AS THE BLAIR COMMISSION) HERALDS THE KALOMO CASH TRANSFER SCHEME.
- THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS WELCOMED THE CASH TRANSFER SCHEME IN ITS CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS OF THE 34TH SESSION HELD FROM 25 APRIL TO 13 MAY 2005 AND URGED THE ZAMBIAN GOVERNMENT TO CONTINUE SUPPORTING THE KALOMO PILOT CASH TRANSFER SCHEME.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, ALLOW ME TO TURN MY ATTENTION TO THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION. SOCIAL PROTECTION REFERS TO POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT PROTECT AND PROMOTE THE LIVELIHOODS AND WELFARE OF PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM CRITICAL LEVELS OF POVERTY AND DEPRIVATION AND THOSE THAT ARE VULNERABLE TO SOCIAL RISKS AND SHOCKS.

IN POOR COUNTRIES SUCH AS ZAMBIA, LARGE NUMBERS OF THE POOR REMAIN TRAPPED IN LONG TERM CHRONIC POVERTY WHICH TEND TO BE TRANSMITTED FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION. WOMEN, CHILDREN, OLDER PEOPLE AND THE DISABLED TEND TO BE THE MOST AFFECTED. THESE GROUPS SUFFER FROM HUNGER AND LOW ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH SERVICES. THEREFORE THE TWIN CHALLENGES OF HIGH POVERTY LEVELS AND HIGH PREVALENCE RATE OF HIV-AIDS MAKE IT IMPERATIVE THAT OUR GOVERNMENT LEAD THE WAY IN THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN OUR COMMUNITIES

THERE ARE SOME INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARGUE THAT SOCIAL PROTECTION IS LARGELY A WASTE OF RESOURCES AS IT IS MERE CONSUMPTION. I BELIEVE THIS KIND OF THINKING IS MISPLACED BECAUSE SOCIAL PROTECTION IS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT AND PRE-REQUISITE FOR POVERTY REDUCTION. DEVELOPED COUNTRIES GAVE IMPETUS TO THEIR DEVELOPMENT PROCESS PARTLY BECAUSE THEY PUT IN PLACE ROBUST AND FUNCTIONING SOCIAL PROTECTION SCHEMES.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE NEED FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION IS PREMISED ON THE FOLLOWING FIVE

REASONS:

1. NO MEANINGFUL AND SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH CAN BE ACHIEVED IN THE ABSENCE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION. AT THE SAME TIME, ECONOMIC GROWTH IS NECESSARY TO MAKE POSSIBLE THE FINANCING OF SOCIAL

PROTECTION PROGRAMMES. SOCIAL PROTECTION STRENGTHENS THE CAPACITY OF THE POOR TO FACE RISKS AND REDUCES THE NEED FOR EXPENSIVE EMERGENCY INTERVENTIONS IN CASE OF SHOCKS.

2. SOCIAL PROTECTION CONTRIBUTES DIRECTLY TO POVERTY REDUCTION BY PROVIDING DIRECT TRANSFERS TO PEOPLE WITH NO IMMEDIATE CAPACITY TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES. THIS MAY BE DONE BY RAISING THEIR INCOMES AND CONSUMPTION LEVELS, AND PROVIDING ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH OF THE POOR. CASH TRANSFERS TO ORPHANS AND OTHER VULNERABLE CHILDREN SHOULD NOT BE DEEMED AS "HANDOUTS". THERE CANNOT BE A FUTURE FOR OUR COUNTRIES IF OUR PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED YEARS OF MALNUTRITION, ILL HEALTH AND LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION.
3. THE INFLUX OF CASH EVEN IN MODEST AMOUNTS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES LEADS TO THE GENERATION OF LOCAL MARKETS WITH THE RESULTING POSITIVE ECONOMIC MULTIPLIER EFFECTS.
4. SOCIAL PROTECTION PROMOTES EQUITY BY REDUCING INCOME INEQUALITIES. INEQUALITY IF NOT SERIOUSLY ADDRESSED CAN BE A FERTILE GROUND FOR POLITICAL

UPHEAVALS, CRIME AND OTHER ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR.

5. SOCIAL PROTECTION LEADS TO THE FULFILMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE BY PROVIDING SERVICES THAT STRENGTHEN AND SECURE THEIR ACCESS TO BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS. IN SHORT SOCIAL PROTECTION IS A VERY EFFICIENT VEHICLE FOR PROVIDING SOCIAL JUSTICE TO EVERY MEMBER OF OUR SOCIETY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE ARGUMENT THAT SOCIAL TRANSFERS CREATE DEPENDENCY. AN EXCEPTION MUST BE MADE FOR INCAPACITATED HOUSEHOLDS. WHERE THE HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS MAY BE TOO OLD, SICK OR TOO YOUNG TO WORK, SUCH HOUSEHOLDS CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN INCOME GENERATION ACTIVITIES, SUCH AS FARMING OR MICRO CREDIT SCHEMES. THEREFORE, THE ONLY OPTION IS TO OFFER THEM CASH TRANSFERS IF THEY ARE TO SURVIVE AND BENEFIT FROM NATIONAL GROWTH.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I AM PLEASED TO INFORM YOU THAT WE IN ZAMBIA HAVE COME UP WITH A SOCIAL PROTECTION STRATEGY DOCUMENT WHICH IS A COMPLIMENT TO THE POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPER. FURTHERMORE, MY GOVERNMENT HAS IDENTIFIED SOCIAL PROTECTION AS A VITAL PART OF THE NEW NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN TO BE LAUNCHED SOON

IN ZAMBIA THE FOLLOWING ARE THE EXAMPLES OF BASIC SOCIAL PROTECTION INSTRUMENTS:

1. THE PUBLIC WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME;
2. PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMMES
3. FOOD SECURITY PACK
4. EDUCATION BURSARIES FOR CHILDREN IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS
5. MICRO-CREDIT SCHEMES
6. CASH TRANSFER SCHEME.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT IS IMPORTANT TO IMPLEMENT BASIC SOCIAL PROTECTION STRATEGIES TOGETHER WITH A RANGE OF DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS THAT EXPLICITLY TARGETS THE POOR AND AT THE SAME TIME INTEGRATING THEM WITH OTHER APPROACHES TO POVERTY REDUCTION THROUGH KEY POLICY PROCESSES SUCH AS THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE MAIN ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE WIDENING AND DEEPENING OF SOCIAL TRANSFER SCHEMES IN POOR COUNTRIES HAS BEEN THE SEEMINGLY HIGH COST. UNFORTUNATELY THE OPPONENTS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION HAVE IMPORTED ARGUMENTS FROM EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA WHERE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS ARE UNDER PRESSURE. SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES REQUIRE A CERTAIN PERCENTAGE OF A COUNTRY'S GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT TO BE SET ASIDE OR RING-FENCED. AS A COUNTRY AND REGION, WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE

THAT THE WEAK AND POOR IN OUR SOCIETIES ARE PROTECTED. THE GREATNESS OF ANY NATION CAN ONLY BE JUDGED BY THE WAY IT TREATS THE POOR, THE WEAK AND THE DISADVANTAGED IN ITS MIDST. WE HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO PUT RESOURCES INTO SOCIAL PROTECTION.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE THEME OF THE CONFERENCE "A TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 21st CENTURY" IS MOST THOUGHT-PROVOKING. I AM REMINDED OF A CONFERENCE AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS MILLENNIUM WHICH WAS ORGANISED BY THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK AND THE WORLD BANK WHOSE THEME WAS "CAN AFRICA CLAIM THE 21st CENTURY?". THE REPORT IDENTIFIED THAT 80% OF THE AFRICAN POPULATION LIVES IN POVERTY. INDEED IF AFRICAN COUNTRIES HAVE TO RESPOND IN THE AFFIRMATIVE, THEN WE NEED TO BEGIN BY STRENGTHENING AND WIDENING OUR SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS. WE NEED GOOD SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS IF WE HAVE TO CLAIM AFRICA FOR OUR CHILDREN. I THANK ALL THOSE COOPERATING PARTNERS WHO ARE SUPPORTING SOCIAL PROTECTION INITIATIVES IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I WOULD BE FAILING IN MY DUTIES IF I DID NOT THANK THE AFRICAN UNION, HELPAGE INTERNATIONAL, THE DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE UK AND INDEED THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE FOR SUCCESSFULLY ORGANISING THIS CONFERENCE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT IS NOT MY WISH TO TAKE MUCH OF YOUR TIME. I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME TO COME AND OFFICIALLY OPEN THIS IMPORTANT CONFERENCE. ON BEHALF OF MY GOVERNMENT, AND INDEED ON MY OWN BEHALF, IT IS THEREFORE MY HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE TO DECLARE THIS INTER-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL PROTECTION OFFICIALLY OPENED AND I WISH YOU FRUITFUL AND SUCCESSFUL DELIBERATIONS.

I THANK YOU ALL.