

WEDNESDAY, 7 MARCH, 2018

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

CONSTRUCTION OF MOBILE COMMUNICATION TOWERS PHASE II

The Minister of Transport and Communication (Mr Mushimba)

Madam Speaker, I wish to express my sincere appreciation of according me yet another opportunity to deliver a ministerial statement and update the House and the nation on the state of the construction of mobile communication towers project phase II that is taking place across the country.

As previously, communicated, this important project by the Government will increase mobile coverage and access from the current low 70 per cent to cover almost 100 per cent of the country at the completion of the project and in so doing, increase the efficiency in the provision of information and communications technology services across the country.

Madam Speaker, Zambia is the 39th largest country in the world with a geographical spread at 752,618 sq km, it is vast and wide with rural areas that have continued to be sparsely populated. This situation has continued to pose many challenges in taking telecommunications services to these far flung areas and achieve universal access to communication facilities because, they are in the most cases not considered to viable business locations by the mobile network providers and other Information Communication Technology (ICT) service operators. This has resulted in the perpetuation of the existing digital divide between rural and urban areas that this Government of His Excellency the President Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu is attempting to address fervently.

Madam, the scope of works in Phase II of the communications towers project covers the construction and installation of the total of 1,009 sites across the country upgrading the current transmission and radio access network and other ICT facilities under The Zambia Telecommunication Company Limited (ZAMTEL) at a cost US\$280 million. This project is primarily targeting dense clusters of settlements and economically active areas in the underserved and unserved areas such as rural health centre, schools, farming blocks, mines,

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tourism centres and rural trading centres and will connect approximately 3.5 million more Zambians to the network that have been off the grid all these years once we complete the project. Further, the project has created some much needed employment of about thirty persons per site, is capacitating entrepreneurship in rural areas with accessible communications facilities, enabling online transactions and promoting financial inclusion by banking the unbanked.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform this august House that progress of work on the entire project that started in the last quarter of 2017 to date is estimated at 15 per cent. As at end of February, 2018, 110 towers across the country have been constructed out of which sixty-six were functional and on air. The distribution of the 110 towers that have been constructed per province is as follows:

<i>Province</i>	<i>Number of towers</i>
Central	16
Copperbelt	02
Lusaka	00
Eastern	12
Luapula	10
North-Western	01
Northern & Muchinga	47
Southern	11
Western	11

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Madam Speaker, we are now focusing on the 246 new sites, which we plan to construct this year and will be distributed district by district as follows:

<i>District</i>	<i>Number of Towers</i>
Chadiza	09
Chama	05
Chilubi	06
Chingola	01
Chinsali	02
Chipata	04
Choma	04
Chongwe	03
Gwembe	08
Isoka	02
Itezhi-tezhi	02
Kabompo	01
Kabwe	02