

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON
THE UPDATE ON PROGRAMME TO END CHILD-MARRIAGE
AND CURRENT STATE OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
BY THE
HON. MINISTER OF GENDER, MS KALIMA

Mr Speaker, it is with gratitude that I present a ministerial statement on this first day of the Third Meeting of the First Session of the Twelfth National Assembly in an effort to keep the citizens informed on topical issues that concern them. My statement today addresses two pertinent issues, namely; an update on the programme to end child-marriage and the current state of gender-based violence in the country.

Mr Speaker, child-marriage is defined as a union between male and female persons with either one or both being below the age of eighteen years. Globally, child-marriage has been identified as one of the detriments to development and to the realisation of human rights, especially children's rights. It is considered one form of gender-based violence and Zambia has not been spared. Available statistics indicate that an estimated 31 per cent of women, aged twenty to twenty-four years, marry before their eighteenth birthday whilst 45 per cent of women aged twenty-five to forty-nine years, who are a generation older, report being married before the age of eighteen.

The above statistics imply that there is an inter-generational decrease in the number of women getting married before the age of eighteen. In comparison, the marriage rate for males between twenty and twenty-four years, stands at 5.9 per cent. As for males aged between twenty-nine and forty-nine years, the rate is at 9.6 per cent. These statistics, especially for the women in the twenty-nine to forty-nine age group, are the highest in the African region.

According to a study conducted by Population Council in 2016, the prevalence rate of child-marriage is as follows:

<i>District</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>Rate (%)</i>
Chama	Muchinga	44
Mpulungu	Northern	43.5
Chiluba	Luapula	40
Lundazi	Eastern	39.8
Katete	Eastern	39
Mbala	Northern	38.2
Kaputa	Northern	38.1
Nyimba	Eastern	37.8
Mungwi	Northern	36.9
Mafinga	Northern	35.3
Petauke	Eastern	35.2
Lufwanyama	Copperbelt	34.9
Chinsali	Northern	34.4
Luwingu	Northern	33.8
Samfya	Luapula	33.7

Mr Speaker, the prevalence rate for boys and girls, is at 1 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively. As a result of child-marriage, girls continue to die from childbirth complications and both girls and boys continue to drop out of the school system, thereby reducing their chances of escaping the poverty trap.

A study conducted in Zambia attributed child-marriage to poverty; limited access to information and services; few opportunities for leisure and recreation, skills development and employment; prohibitive cost of sending children to secondary school; marriage as a response to teenage pregnancy; inadequate care for orphans and stepchildren; lack of a risk management strategy for difficult or hard-to-manage children; and inadequate child supervision or social support.

To this end, I am glad to report that the Patriotic Front (PF) Government, through my ministry, has put in place a National Strategy and its Plan of Action on Ending Child Marriage 2016 – 2021, which is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The strategy aims at eliminating harmful practices such as child and forced marriages. Further, the strategy aims at providing a clear policy, legal strategic and operational framework for co-ordination and national mobilisation and service delivery that will accelerate the nation's effort of zero-tolerance to child-marriage. The national strategy and its plan of action are being implemented by a consortium of eleven ministries to tackle all negative aspects of child-marriage.

Mr Speaker, allow me to inform this House that the Government has developed the Marriage and Child Code Bills in a bid to effectively address child-marriage in the country, among other measures. The Bills, which will be tabled before Parliament soon, will also help address the challenge arising from dual marriage laws, namely; customary and statutory. The Child Code Bill will particularly help to address the definition of a child. This is because a child is defined differently in different circles, including at the instances of obtaining national documents such as the green national registration card (NRC), driving licence, voter's card and so on.

Mr Speaker, a number of programmes are being implemented or co-ordinated by my ministry. One of these programmes is the Government of the Republic of Zambia - United Nations (GRZ-UN) joint programme on gender-based violence and the Girls Education and Women's Livelihood (GEWEL) project aimed at keeping girls in school, with a view of keeping them away from the negative vices which come with early marriages. One other programme we intend to implement with our co-operating partners in Luapula and Northern Provinces is at pilot level.

Mr Speaker, with this opportunity, the campaign, especially in the area of ending child marriages, has support from almost all stakeholders. Chiefs or traditional leaders, civil society organisations (CSOs) and co-operating partners have brought forth the vision to end this vice, into Government. This multi-sectoral approach has led to decreased rates of child marriage and has earned His Excellency, President Edgar Chagwa Lungu, a title of champion in ending child marriages under the African Union (AU).