

PROTEST TO THE ZAMBIAN PRESIDENT AND AUTHORITIES OVER THE CONTINUED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BAROTSELAND

We the Barotse National Freedom Alliance (BNFA) on behalf of the people of Barotse wish to protest in the strongest terms to the President and Authorities of Zambia over the continued Human Rights violations in Barotse. The situation is rapidly deteriorating and has the potential to soon erupt into large scale hostilities that can engulf the whole sub-region into firefighting endeavours and manoeuvres.

BACKGROUND

You do not need any reminding Mr President that the Barotse issue is a half-century perennial problem that all your five predecessors have grappled with but to no avail because of using the wrong tactics and formulas. You will recall that when you launched your presidential campaign, you promised the people of Zambia that if elected to the office of President you will endeavour to be a listening President. For a little while following your taking up the office of President, it appeared as though this was turning out to be the case at least in as far as your earlier pronouncements over the issue of Barotse were concerned. Unfortunately, as time went on, the high excitement and enthusiasm that your earlier pronouncement seemed to have created died out giving way to utter frustration and disillusionment to some amongst us especially the more youthful ones who are turning to other means of expressing themselves more and more, which may not be necessarily orthodox. A case in point is the Lukulu graffiti case where GRZ vehicles and buildings were painted with Barotse independence messages.

We, as responsible leaders committed to ***non-violence, human rights, rule of law, democracy and protection of the environment*** in accordance with the Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organization (UNPO) covenant to which we subscribe and are signatories, are trying our best and using the best anger management techniques to keep the situation as calm as can possibly be. Yet some prevailing conditions and circumstances are making this task to be very difficult.

CONDITIONS NEGATING THE PREVALENCE OF PEACE AND ORDER IN BAROTSELAND

- The influx and build up of police presence in Mongu is a very disturbing phenomenon in Barotse because it makes the region feel and appear to be a militarised war zone. That in itself raises tension among the unarmed masses that are otherwise peaceful and peace loving. The sight of police officers armed to the teeth in riot gear roaming the otherwise peaceful streets is nerve-racking to say the least. One is left with no doubt but to believe that Barotse has become a police state.
- Closely related to the above is the constant harassment of Barotse nationals especially those known to be advocates of Barotse's RIGHT to self determination. For example whenever Barotse nationals endeavour to approach the Kuta at Limulunga for clarification on matters perceived to be of national importance, they are usually swarmed by police officers sometimes in riot gear as if by wanting to consult the Kuta, they become convicted criminals. Another case in point is the recent malicious arrest of a Mr. Phelim Kaingu of Livingstone for allegedly being in possession of seditious material when in fact what was in his possession was a printout of an article from some online media. How that could be classified as seditious is quite a marvel.
- The lack of dialogue between the BRE and the people is another source of tension. While this may be perceived to be an internal issue that does not have anything to do with the Zambian occupying forces, the fact that the Zambian police is always there to offer or promise 'protection' to the Kuta eludes it and makes it shy away

from its responsibility to engage the people it is supposed to lead while feeling insulated against any retribution from the people. While there is an information gap between the Barotse Authorities and the Barotse people, the media is teeming with all kinds of information on Barotseland some of which are total fabrication crafted by the enemies of Barotseland to cause confusion.

- The absence of forward motion over the President's promised and much publicised dialogue with ALL stakeholders in Barotseland is frustrating and infuriating many Barotse nationals who had hoped the engagement would go some miles in the right direction to ease the tension and explore possible amicable solutions to the half century impasse.
- The much publicised and rumoured engagement between the Zambian Government/President (including former Presidents) behind closed doors with a fraction of the so-called BRE including the Litunga just adds salt to injury because they reduce the Barotse issue to a bedroom affair other than the national and international magnitude with which it is perceived by the majority of the people. While it is common knowledge that:

- i. The Barotse issue was discussed with resolutions made at the highest level of the decision making process in Barotseland's hierarchical structure, the BNC; which included all District resident princes and princesses (*Malena ni Milena Mikwae*), all District Kutas with representation from the Areas (*Lilalos*), all civil society organizations (CSOs) concerned with the Barotse issue and otherwise referred to as Activists or Nationalist organizations and indeed ordinary people from all walks of life in Barotseland society.
- ii. It was the BNFA who wrote to you, Mr. President on 26th January, 2015 barely a day after your swearing in as President of Zambia requesting you to prioritize the Barotse issue and engage all stakeholders to find a mutually accepted and amicable solution in line with internationally accepted norms, saying among other things that; *"We trust and hope that you will not run away from this reality as did your predecessors but engage us in the transition process of actualizing Barotseland statehood in a pacific manner."* You responded almost immediately by sending your emissary to the BNFA Chairman General Hon Clement W. Sinyinda on 27th January 2015 and later spoke in person to him on the morning of 28th January 2015 promising commencement of the engagement with the Barotse people immediately upon your return from your eminent AU summit trip and consequently you were quoted by the press on the sidelines of the AU summit committing yourself to engaging the Barotse people
- iii. When the BNFA Chairman General was asked by your emissary as to who should be involved in the proposed engagements he clearly pointed out that he wanted the dialogue to be as inclusive as possible and pointed out that the BRE at the apex (Namusu) and District Kuta levels, including other CSO not necessarily under the BNFA umbrella should all be involved. Your emissary promised to contact the BRE and that is the last we have heard of the talks. It is widely believed through information from the grapevine facility that BRE advised you that BNFA and its Chairman General should not be part to any discussions because they are not in charge of Barotseland.

The people of Barotseland find it particularly insulting and demeaning that the Zambian government has chosen to discuss this issue of such magnitude with just an individual in the person of the Litunga and perhaps a few of his handpicked henchmen to the exclusion of the rest of the stakeholders. This information has been collaborated by senior police officers who cancelled a duly notified meeting on the basis that the Barotse issue is being discussed at a higher level in Lusaka. This way of handling issues is clearly barking the wrong tree and will not achieve the desired results unless the Zambian government's want to divide Barotseland and see it go-up in flames. Barotseland does not belong to one person and no single person or institution in Barotseland is above the Barotse National Council, not even the Litunga or the BRE. The BNFA was actually formed due to popular perception that the BRE in its current form and shape was not able to handle and implement the March 2012 BNC resolutions unaided by civil society.

- Finally and most crucially, the infringements of the RIGHT of Association and Assembly on the people of Barotseland, especially those who believe in Barotseland's RIGHT to self-determination and self-rule, are unacceptable. The President who we believe is well versed in these matters being a lawyer well understands that Human RIGHTS are not negotiable and no one has the mandate to ration for others their Human RIGHTS. It must be appreciated that the unrest that culminated into the January 14th 2011 massacre of innocent Barotse nationals started with the state tempering and trampling underfoot the people's Right of Assembly. The occupying Zambia state police constantly denied the people of Barotseland the Right to hold public rallies and meetings. It is clearly not fair that all kinds of people from outside Barotseland can come to Barotseland and address all kinds of rallies, meetings and gatherings, including politicians from both sides of the divide, the first lady Mrs Esther Lungu who happens to be the President's spouse, to talk on any subject including the Barotseland issue but the Barotse are not allowed to discuss their issue and their RIGHT to self-determination and self-rule even when they go out of their way to comply with the laws currently in force by notifying the police seven (7) days in advance.

OUR DEMAND

We wish to call upon you Mr. President and the powers that be to address the above anomalies without any further delay because insurmountable pressure and tension is enveloping the whole of Barotseland with anger and frustration being the most predominant emotion among our people especially the more youthful ones.

We especially demand that, with immediate effect, the invisible ban on meetings and public rallies in Barotseland on the Barotse issue be lifted because we plan to hold such meetings and rallies all over Barotseland in our newly adopted outreach strategy to carry out mass sensitization among our people so that they are not engulfed in darkness that is caused by lack of information, misinformation or indeed the influx of wrong information. Just like the President intervened to allow the Tonga meeting to go ahead against the numerous 'barkings' by some of his colleagues calling for the rolling of heads should that meeting go ahead, which act is highly commended, we want you in the same manner to lift the embargo on Barotseland related meetings in Barotseland.

We are carrying on our shoulders the heavy burden of the aspirations and expectations of the people of Barotseland and their yearning desire to stand among the sisterhood of the nations of the world as a people in their own right. The people of Barotseland true to their distinct and distinguishing trait and characteristic as a peace loving people have expressed and demonstrated their desire to use only peaceful means to resolve this issue over the past fifty (50) years or so. They

have sent delegation after delegation to each of your predecessors, made submission after submission, petition after petition and representation after representation; all pleading for an opportunity to seek and find a pacific settlement to the Barotse issue. Much so especially after the Zambian government's unilateral abrogation of the Barotseland Agreement 1964 which in our opinion was the only glue that held Barotseland to the rest of Zambia.

After every effort aimed at convincing the Zambian government to reconsider their unilateral abrogation of the unity treaty with Barotseland with a view to restore it proved to be an exercise in futility, the people of Barotseland through the BNC of March 2012 (which is a culmination of a process that starts from the lowest unit of the Barotse society upward) resolved to accept Zambia's abrogation and repudiation of the Barotseland Agreement 1964 and move on by pursuing their own right to self-determination and self-rule. Our communication of this decision and the need to engage each other to your immediate past predecessor fell on deaf ears. Neither did any of our every other effort thereafter get any appropriate response or attention from those that held and welded power other than to brutalize and incarcerate some of us with the intent to force us into silence and forced submission. Yes indeed, we are a peace loving and a peaceful people but we refuse to be coward into keeping silent when things are not going well, when our people are being down trodden upon, when our rights are being denied us and being stolen from us in broad day light. We refused to be bullied into keeping silent because we are cognisant of the fact that, as Martin Luther King Jr. aptly put it;

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter"

We do believe Mr. President that the Barotseland issue is about basic and fundamental Human Rights, the right to self determination and all other related Rights like the Right to Association the Right to Assembly and the right to hold opinion.

We do believe Mr. President that the people of Barotseland are a people and as a people are entitled to the RIGHT to self-determination.

We do believe Mr. President that the people of Barotseland seek freedom from unjust domination.

We do believe Mr. President that IT IS NOT TREASON TO SEEK FREEDOM, consequently, harassment, state sponsored terrorism, unlawful arrests and incarcerations will not solve the Barotse issue. The Zambian regime has used this tactic of harassment, intimidation and incarceration since 1965 when the first Barotse Patriots were arrested and this is 2015 and the issue has not gone away! Fifty long years of using the same tactics without any positive result! They say you cannot use the same method over and over again and expect to get different results. Barak H. Obama's statement over the just ended UN festivities ever rings so true;

"You can jail your opponents but you can't imprison ideas. You can try to control access to information but you cannot turn a lie into truth"

CONCLUSION

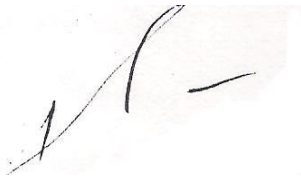
We are comforted by the fact that so far your actions and pronouncement have tended to indicate that you do not encourage the culture of harassment against the people of Barotseland but rather want to cultivate the culture of dialogue and understanding as a mutually accepted solution to the problems at hand is eagerly being awaited. As a seasoned lawyer yourself you should be aware of the fact that, in Martin Luther King Jr.'s words again;

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

We wish to further state that should you follow through your stated commitment to resolve the Barotseland issue by establishing an amicable solution that is mutually acceptable and that meets international standards and norms, you would distinguish and establish yourself as a leader standing head and shoulder above all your predecessors. You will be equated and comparable to the likes of Michael Gorbachev of the then USSR and Fredrick De Klerk of South Africa. In this respect you will be someone fitting for consideration and nomination for a Nobel Peace Prize in the near future.

On our part Mr. President, we wish to assure you that we are not about to give up on our conviction that indeed Barotseland has a right to self-determination and self-rule. We represent a group of people who are prepared to go through thin and thick until this ideal is achieved. No matter how intense the persecution, how sophisticated the forms of harassment and how crooked the arrests and incarcerations, we are prepared to soldier on to the last man standing. We would rather go down in history as a people who perished to the very last man in order to achieve what was their RIGHT just like the wise saying in our language which says "Mufa na saye ni muteeba" the translation of which is that "He is blessed who dies for what is his by right".

BAROTSE NATIONAL FREEDOM ALLIANCE (BNFA)



CLEMENT W. SINYINDA
CHAIRMAN GENERAL



MUNGANDI wa MUWINA-MUNGANDI
SECRETARY GENERAL