

ECL'S ONE YEAR IN OFFICE—A BAROTSE PERSPECTIVE

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Edgar Chagwa Lungu (ECL)'s first year at the helm of authority in the failed unitary state of Zambia is a total flop from a Barotse perspective, despite that it started with a lot of hope based on the loud promises made both before and soon after taking over the instruments of power. ECL is urged to redeem himself by taking the necessary remedial actions in the little time still at his disposal before history judges him harshly alongside his predecessors.

Exactly one year ago, Zambians from all corners of the failed unitary state, including the Barotse, were gripped with anxiety as they awaited results of the January 20, 2015 Presidential elections. On January 25, 2015, ECL was sworn into office as Zambia's sixth President and has now clocked a year in the highest office of the land. The world is likely to evaluate his performance from various perspectives. I wish to review ECL's one year in office from a Barotse perspective.

It must be borne in mind that the PF government whose term in office ECL has been mandated to complete, came into office with high sounding promises for Barotseland spurt out by the King Cobra himself (President Michael Chilufya Sata) at the height of the campaign season when he declared himself to be Linyungandambo member number one. Clearly, the King Cobra lamentably failed to deliver on his promises to Barotseland apart from the miniature effort of releasing the Barotse detainees who were incarcerated in Mumbwa state prison and setting up a Commission of inquiry into the January 14, 2011 massacre of Barotseland nationals. The final report of the commission of inquiry, which was chaired by prominent Lusaka Lawyer, Dr. Rodger Chongwe, has been gathering dust on President Sata's desk until his demise in 2014. I have been told that the report had grown wings and feathers and flew out of statehouse to some unknown destination. In other words the report is missing.

It was only fitting that ECL was reminded of his predecessor's empty promises as he took office and asked what he would do with them. Consequently, we were told that a group of Barotse youths sought his audience at the height of the campaign season and soon after his ascendancy to power to whom he too made some promises, among he would:

- immediately restore the dearly beloved name 'Barotseland' in place of the slave name 'Western Province';
- immediately release the Roger Chongwe Commission of Inquiry Report into the January 14, 2014 Mongu Massacre; and
- immediately seek a solution to the Barotse impasse.

It is no secret that ECL never moved an inch to fulfill those promises, which were simply aimed at enticing the youths to give him a vote and influence others to do the same.

Aside hearsay engagements, ECL also made public pronouncements on the issue of Barotseland statehood. Hardly 24 hours from the time that he took office, the Barotse National Freedom Alliance (BNFA) delivered to him an open letter on Monday January 26, 2015 challenging him to face the issue head-on as it was not going away or die a natural death, as all his predecessors had hoped. ECL immediately rose to the occasion by sending an emissary to the BNFA Chairperson General, Hon. and former Prime Minister, Clement W. Sinyinda on Tuesday January 27, 2015. This was followed by a direct telephone call the next day in which ECL committed himself to take up the necessary steps in order to

ensure that an amicable solution is sought and found to resolve the Barotse impasse upon his return from Addis Ababa where he was due to travel in the following day.

While in the Ethiopian capital and, on the sidelines of the African Union (AU) Heads of state and governments Summit, in the glare of the world media, he pronounced that he will immediately engage the Barotse with the intention of finding a solution to the Barotse impasse upon his return to Zambia. As matters stand today, ECL is yet again preparing to fly to another AU Heads of state and government Summit, one year since he made those high sounding commitments and pronouncements, yet again, he never moved an inch to make good those promises. Ironically, he has not publically visited Barotseland since his ascendance to the office of republican President of the failed unitary state of Zambia, although it has been widely rumoured that he had visited the embattled Litunga in Barotseland under the cover of night accompanied by former Presidents Kenneth Kaunda and Rupiah Banda who together comprised a team of 'Three Evil Men from the East'.

It is with much regret that we closed the year 2015 with behind the scenes actions from ECL and his administration aimed at derailing the issue of Barotseland statehood, despite his upbeat undertakings to engage the people of Barotseland on the matter soon after taking office. Speculations of ill-conceived dark corner meetings between the embattled Litunga or his emissaries have been rife. ECL and his administration together with the embattled Litunga and his emissaries should understand that the issue of Barotseland statehood concerns all the Barotse, and dealing with an individual and his emissaries, irrespective of his standing, will never solve the matter or derail the match to its actualization.

What is appalling is the realization that during ECL's first year in office, he has adopted the stance of his predecessors of responding to the peaceful overtures by the people of Barotseland with repressive measures of arrests and detentions on trumped up charges, suppression of Barotse's right of assembly and clamp down on dissemination of information on this important national issue through muzzling of the state controlled news media organizations and illegal police action. It is further appalling that this mode of administration of national affairs are persisting during the tenure of a trained lawyer and under a municipal constitution of the failed unitary state of Zambia that guarantees a wide range of civil liberties, which include the freedom of association, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement and freedom of communication. Most importantly, it is further more appalling that the people of Barotseland have to turn to continental and global authorities to seek redress on these matters when Zambia's municipal law is written in a manner that generates capacity to provide a logical conclusion to the issue of Barotseland in the aftermath of the Zambian regimes unilateral termination of [the Barotseland Agreement 1964](#) forty-seven years ago, which termination was subsequently accepted by the people of Barotseland through the Barotse National Council (BNC) of 2012. By virtue of formerly accepting Zambia's termination of [the Barotseland Agreement](#), this set into motion the disengagement process of Barotseland from the rest of Zambia.

However, since then, the Zambian government has chosen to completely disrespect the wishes of the people of Barotseland by turning a blind eye to their democratically expressed decision of self-determination by continuing to extend its governance and administrative processes over Barotseland illegally. Following his assenting Zambia's new municipal Constitution, the time has now come for ECL and his administration to be ejected out of Barotseland. ECL and the rest of Zambia should wake up to the reality that Barotseland is a separate territory from the rest of Zambia. It is hoped, maybe against hope, that ECL will put up a better performance on the forgoing matters in the remaining few months of his term in office.

The theme of the current AU Heads of state and government Summit whose preliminaries commenced on 21st January, 2016, is “promotion of human rights on the continent”. Barotseland awaits ECL’s submissions in respect to the Zambian situation in general and the Barotseland issue in particular, especially that a report from the African commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights covering **Communication 429/12—The Ngambela of Barotseland and Others versus the Republic of Zambia** is to be presented for adoption and dissemination.

The Zambian policy of violence as demonstrated by arrests, torture and killings has not broken the resolve of the Barotse people to free themselves from the oppressive Zambia regime since 1965, if anything, it has strengthened their resistance against the Zambian regime’s occupation of Barotseland. Free advice to ECL is that the time is overdue for the Zambian government to cease paying lip service to universal covenants and conventions on the observance of Human Rights whose tenets form the core of Zambia’s Bill of Rights.

Another matter that awaits action from ECL is the Submission Agreement for the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), based in The Hague, to pronounce itself on the Government of Zambia’s claim of jurisdiction over Barotseland in the light of termination of [the Barotseland Agreement 1964](#). The advice delivered to ECL by the BNFA contained in a letter dated April 23, 2015 to allow an impartial continental and/or global body pass judgement on the matter of Barotseland is worth repeating, in the light of the incurable amnesia suffered by Zambian authorities to apply logic and the law to this straight forward matter. Accordingly, the people of Barotseland urge ECL to append his signature to the Submission Agreement to give way to the PAC process, the proverbial ostrich will pluck its head out of the sand and see light so as to do the needful.