

Press Release

Friday, 24th August 2007

Civil Society commends MPs for their stance against the NGO Bill - and thanks Government for listening to the voice of the people

The Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), Non Governmental Organisation Coordinating Council (NGOCC) and the Zambia Council for Social Development (ZCSD), would like to thank Members of Parliament and in particular the MPs from United Party for National Development (UPND), Patriotic Front (PF), and United Liberal Party (UPL) who dedicated time and effort to listen and support the people's cause and the concerns of Civil Society on the NGO Bill.

The deferment of the NGO Bill shows that our joint efforts so far have not been in vain. We ask for the continued support of these Members of Parliament in calling for a fair and non-restrictive NGO Bill, which respects our constitutionally guaranteed Human Rights of Free Assembly, Association and Expression.

We would like to state that Civil Society will not hesitate to educate the constituency on how their MPs are making decisions in parliament. We stand ready to publicly let the electorate know which of their MPs are not representing their constituencies interest by voting for motions and decisions that are detrimental to the advancement of the citizens well being.

We would also like to thank Government for having listened to the many concerns raised on the NGO Bill from a wide variety of stakeholders, ranging from Non-Governmental Organisations, International Non-Governmental Organisations and the Faith-Based Organisations.

However, we urge the Government, now, to embark on a thorough, inclusive and open process of consultation with all relevant stakeholders. We need to make sure that any NGO regulation in Zambia will strengthen and not weaken the ability of the NGO sector to contribute to the development of a prosperous and democratic Zambia. NGOs provide a vital service to millions of Zambians, and should be viewed as essential partners in progress.

CSPR, NGOCC and ZCSD call on Government to start the consultative process as soon as possible, and we would welcome the chance to assist in setting out a road-map for creating a fair, just and appropriate NGO policy framework and NGO regulation.

The three Organisations would like to extend their offer to assist in sensitising the communities and general public through having their own or joint activities with government aimed at bringing on board the voices of the majority to the consultation process.

We wish also to state here that in demonstration of our commitment to work with government, we have since written to the Republican President, His Excellency Levy Patrick Mwanawasa, SC to request for an audience with him. The intention of the meeting is to engage the President on the NGO Bill and get his sentiments as Head of State. We do hope that our request for a meeting will be received with favourable response

Issued by: *Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), Non-Governmental Organisations Coordinating Council (NGOCC) and Zambia Council for Social Development (ZCSD)*