

WASTAGE OF PUBLIC RESOURCES SHOULD NEVER BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE – SAYS JCTR

Fighting poverty and ensuring that every Zambian has access to basic needs such as food, health care, safe shelter, safe and clean water, basic sanitation, education and livelihood can never be achieved without prudence, efficiency and effectiveness in both resource mobilization and allocation. “In a poor country like Zambia where poverty levels are as high as 63% and the incidence of rural poverty as high as 78%,” says Sydney Mwansa, Programme Officer in the Economic Equity and Development Programme of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), “every ngwee counts and should therefore be collected and spent for the intended purpose and beneficiaries.” It remains the country’s number one priority.” This is very cardinal in ensuring an efficient service delivery system that lifts our people out of poverty which has held the country hostage for a long time.

It is very clear from the Auditor General’s Reports from 2008 that improved service delivery and poverty reduction could not be achieved due to non budget adherence and controlling officers’ failure to protect public funds from abuse. The PF government therefore has a challenge of stopping abuse of public resources in all the government ministries, provinces and spending agencies. This has to be done urgently if we are to make meaningful progress to social justice. According to the 2010 Auditor General’s Report, from 2008 to 2010, misappropriation of funds increased from K70 million to a staggering K1.1 billion while the misapplication increased from K8 billion to K221 billion. Wasteful expenditure also worsened from K570 million to K7.4 billion while un-retired imprest amounts increased from K22 billion to K77 billion. Contrary to the approved budget of 2010, the government incurred unconstitutional excess expenditure of K814 billion. A total of K1.8 billion of revenue was un-accounted for in 2010. This money belongs to the Zambian people and should therefore be collected so that it can be used to better the lives of the Zambian people.

The report also makes it clear that non tax revenue has been abused and this has robbed the Zambian people of funds that would enhance their access to public services. All government institutions charged with responsibilities of collecting revenue should therefore ensure that all funds supposed to be collected are collected and accounted for. Non tax revenue has great potential of contributing more to government revenue and thus supplement in closing the budget deficit currently being financed by domestic and external borrowing and aid which are not sustainable.

“From the commendable reports of the Auditor General, it is clear,” says Sydney Mwansa, “that we need concerted and coordinated efforts in ensuring prudent management of public resources.” We should thus focus on putting in place effective measures of preventing abuse of public resources and strict corrective measures. To be able to prevent abuse, all public officers must adhere to laid down procedures and regulations and the Controlling Officers must take charge and perform that which is expected of them and lead by example. Internal audit systems must also be seen to perform their functions and the law enforcement agencies, the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions must play active roles in ensuring that recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee regarding the findings of the Auditor General are acted upon to make sure that culprits are brought to book. Let us support the efforts of the Office of the Auditor General in ensuring accountability of all public resources so that they reach all the intended beneficiaries in all the areas of the country. The government should also ensure budget adherence and timely allocation of funds. Only then shall we achieve social justice and independence from poverty.