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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written submission by Zambia: Human Rights Commission*

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Human Rights Council the written statement submitted by Zambia: Human Rights Commission,** which is being circulated in accordance with rule 7 (b) of the rules of procedure of the Council (see resolution 5/1, annex) and with the arrangements and practices agreed upon by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 2005/74.

* National human rights institution with A status accreditation from the Global Alliance of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

** Circulated as received, in the language of submission only.

Annex

I. Written statement by Zambia: Human Rights Commission

A. Written statement on Zambia and the Impact of Climate Change

1. Mr. President, the impact of climate in Zambia is devastating and can be felt everywhere. It is causing increased droughts, floods, and extreme temperatures, severely affecting agriculture and food security, water resources, energy, infrastructure, and socio-economic development. Many businesses especially small and medium enterprises, which create employment for poor and marginalized persons, have closed due to severe energy shortage. Generally, floods and droughts have increased in frequency and severity over the past three decades, affecting millions and costing the nation an estimated 0.4% in annual economic growth. Climate change impacts will have profound negative impacts on different sectors and worsen vulnerability of the categories of the population who are already vulnerable.

1. Climate Change and Agriculture

2. Zambia's agriculture sector is highly vulnerable to climate change, with key risks including lower maize yields, increased occurrence of extreme weather events, and reduced rainfall. These changes threaten food security and livelihoods, particularly for subsistence farmers. More than half of Zambia's workforce is employed in agriculture mainly through peasant farming. As smallholder farmers, they mostly practice rain-fed agriculture and produce 85 percent of Zambia's agricultural products, mostly cereals such as maize, sorghum and millet. Most of this agriculture is non-mechanized, relying heavily on animal draught power and human labor. Even where irrigation is employed, most of it is at small scale level and labour intensive.

3. In 2024, Zambia experienced the driest agricultural season in more than forty years, resulting in significant crop losses, increased livestock deaths, and worsening poverty. Over nine million people in 84 out of the 117 districts were affected by the drought according to the government crop assessment data. The 2023/2024 rainfall season was characterized by late onset, prolonged dry spells, and high temperatures. This erratic rainfall affected crop production resulting in total crop failure in 982,765 hectares out of an estimated 2,272,931 hectares of maize. The Meteorological Department reports show that the most affected regions were Central, Eastern, Southern and Western provinces. These provinces have over the past five years contributed over 58 per cent of the annual national maize crop production. These provinces also host over 76 per cent of livestock, that equally experienced decreased access to pasture and water. Grain production recorded a decrease of 1,511,143 metric tonnes (Mt) from 3,261,686 Mt produced in the previous agricultural season representing a 53.6 per cent decrease. The 2023/2024 agricultural season output remains lowest ever recorded when compared to the five-year average.

2. Climate Change and Energy

4. Mr President, Zambia relies on hydropower for approximately 80 per cent of its electricity. Most of this power is generated from such major facilities as Kariba and Kafue Gorge, in Southern Zambia. However, Southern Zambia is increasingly becoming vulnerable to severe droughts. Due to climate change, the region receives far less rainfall, on average less than 800 mm per annum, compared with other regions in the country. For example, in the 2023/24 rain season, the country experienced an intense drought driven by the El Niño phenomenon. The devastating result was a dramatic drop in water levels in Kafue and Zambezi rivers, which had a severe impact on agriculture productivity and power generation. At its lowest point, the output from Lake Kariba, along the Zambezi River, plummeted by 80 per cent, leaving all urban areas, including major cities such as Lusaka and mining hubs in the north with power outages lasting up to 20 hours per day.

5. In Zambia, power outages (loadshedding) are posing a significant challenge to businesses especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), who account for about 70% of total employment and contributes approximately 30% to the national GDP. Due to increased frequency of droughts and the resultant energy crisis, Zambia reportedly experienced manufacturing sector losses of approximately \$1 billion in potential revenue due to load shedding. (ii) SMEs experienced an average increase in operational costs of 25% due to load shedding, leading to reduced profit margins and business closures. (iii) The World Bank estimates that Zambia's GDP growth slowed from 4.1% in 2022 to 2.5% in 2023, primarily due to the energy crisis. (iv) Unemployment rates increased, with the Zambia Association of Manufacturers reporting a decline in industrial output by 10%. (v) The average household expenditure on energy-related costs rose by 20% in 2023, further straining family budgets.

3. Climate change and forestry damage

6. Mr President, land-use change and forestry (LUCF) remains the most dominant source of Zambia's GHG emissions, accounting for 59% of total emissions in 2021. The main drivers are deforestation arising from charcoal burning and large-scale land-based investments projects including farming and forest degradation due to human activities. Most rural households are aware of the rapidly declining forest cover in their area. Approximately 63% of farmers report seeing a reduction in nearby forests. Yet many continue to rely on charcoal production, often as a coping strategy when crops fail. Research indicates that charcoal-driven forest degradation now rivals deforestation from agricultural expansion as the primary cause of tree cover loss in Zambia. Charcoal production degrades an estimated 190,000 hectares of Zambia's forests each year.

7. The recent drought in Zambia has caused significant damage to the country's forests, particularly by the charcoal production sector. Most low income households resorted to using charcoal as source of energy due to load shedding by the national power utility company, necessitated by the drought which resulted in reduced power production at major hydropower plants. The drought led to the loss of an estimated 324,000 hectares of natural forest in 2024, which is a major concern for the country's forest conservation efforts. The drought has forced smallholder farmers to turn to charcoal production as an alternative source of income, contributing to the degradation of the forest.

4. Climate Induced Migration

8. In the 70s and 80s, Southern Zambia was known as the food basket of the nation because of its agricultural production. The Southern province, particularly, used to produce more maize than any other province. That is no longer the case mainly due to climate change and as a result, in recent years, thousands of people from the Southern, Lusaka and Southern parts of Central Province have relocated to Northern regions of the country in search of greener pastures for their livestock and land with better rainfall for crop production. According to the latest International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix Report of January 2025, this crisis and other climate-related factors has caused significant displacement, impacting over 202,000 individuals in the affected areas. Of those displaced, 56% are female and 44% male, highlighting the disproportionate impact of the crisis on women. Additionally, 36% of the displaced individuals are children, which underscores the vulnerability of younger populations. These displacements have left much of the population vulnerable to exploitation and protection risks.

5. Conclusion

9. Mr. President, the evidence is clear. Climate change is already undermining the enjoyment of human rights in Zambia. It is affecting food production, energy security, water availability, livelihoods, housing, public health and environmental sustainability. It is also driving displacement and increasing the vulnerability of already disadvantaged communities. The Human Rights Commission therefore urges the Government, development partners, the private sector and all stakeholders to adopt human rights-based approaches to climate action. Climate adaptation and mitigation measures must prioritize the needs of most vulnerable, strengthen community resilience, promote sustainable livelihoods and ensure meaningful participation of affected communities in decision-making processes. As Zambia continues to

confront the realities of climate change, it is imperative that environmental protection, sustainable development and human rights are pursued as mutually reinforcing objectives. Protecting the environment is ultimately about protecting people, their dignity, their livelihoods and their future.

I thank you.

Pamela Towela Sambo, PhD.

Chairperson,

Human Rights Commission, Zambia.

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