

Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Commonwealth,

Fellow High Commissioners

Distinguished guests,

ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to representing my country Zambia, one of the proud and committed members of the Commonwealth, as we come together to mark Commonwealth Day 2025.

It is a day on which our special family of nations comes together to celebrate our unique bond based on shared values and principles. This body of independent states is bound together by the Commonwealth Charter, which outlines the values and aspirations that unite our countries.

We are equally bound by the commitments each of our countries made to the development of free and democratic societies, and the promotion of peace and prosperity in order to improve the lives of all the people within our family of nations.

This year's observance is particularly significant as it coincides with His Majesty the King and Queen's upcoming visit to the Holy See and Italy, a visit that highlights the deep historical and cultural ties between the Commonwealth, the Vatican, and Italy. As Zambia's representative in Italy, I have witnessed how these relationships continue to evolve, creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue, economic partnerships, and development cooperation.

Chairperson,

The Republic of Zambia during the last Independence celebration on 24th October, 2024, commemorated its sixtieth anniversary as a member of the Commonwealth, as it became a member on assumption of its independence from British Rule in 1964.

During its membership, Zambia has continued to re-affirm its commitment to the Commonwealth's fundamental values and principles, including tolerance, respect, international peace and security, democracy, good governance, human rights, gender equality, and the rule of law, among others, that promote transparency, accountability and economic development.

In its journey, Zambia was honoured to have been the first African country to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 1979, under the leadership of the great son of Africa, late President, Dr. Kenneth David Kaunda, who served as Zambia's first president, where the main subject of consideration then was the granting of independence to Zimbabwe. The Lusaka Declaration on Racism and Racial Prejudice was adopted. Highlighting that the Commonwealth does not shy away from difficult issues

This notwithstanding, Zambia has continued to be a key player and in the affairs of the Commonwealth and was recently elected Vice-Chair of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group at the 2024 CHOGM in Apia, Samoa, a body which is committed to upholding Commonwealth values and promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law across member nations.

As Vice-Chair, Zambia will collaborate closely with the Commonwealth Chair, Samoa, and other members, to address threats to democracy.

Similarly, in February, 2025, **the Right Honourable, Ms. Patricia Scotland, visited Zambia and reflected on the remarkable journey, of Dr. Kaunda, at the forefront of Zambia's independence movement. She** highlighted the late President's role in shaping Commonwealth values, particularly during the Rhodesian now Zimbabwe crisis.

She also noted that Dr. Kaunda's leadership helped to maintain unity among member countries and paved the way for the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles on elimination of discrimination based on differences of race, color or creed

Chairperson,

Allow me to share experiences, contributions, and insights on how to strengthen cooperation and partnerships among Member States.

Achievements Since the New Dawn Government (2021–Present)

Since the Current Administration assumed office in 2021 under the leadership of President Hakainde Hichilema, Zambia has embarked on a transformative journey, with significant progress in critical areas aligned with commonwealth values and principles:

Gender Equality and Women in Decision-Making

On Gender Equality and Women in Decision-Making

Zambia has made commendable strides in promoting gender equality, evidenced by a 15% increase in women occupying senior decision-

making roles across various sectors. The Gender Equality Act of 2022, which targets 50% representation of women in all decision-making bodies by 2030, is a testament to Zambia's commitment to empowering women. These achievements demonstrate Zambia's leadership in gender parity, making it a valuable contributor to Commonwealth discussions on gender equality.

Women's Economic Empowerment

Furthermore, on **Women's Economic Empowerment**, The launch of the Women Empowerment Fund, which has disbursed over ZMW 500 million to support women-led businesses, and the allocation of 40% of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to women's initiatives, have created over 10,000 jobs for women. Zambia's focus on economically empowering women aligns with Commonwealth emphasis on inclusive economic growth, positioning the country as a leader in promoting women's economic participation.

Education and Health Services

In Health and Education services, Zambia's free education policy has led to a 25% increase in girls' enrolment in secondary schools, while investments in maternal health programs have reduced maternal mortality rates by 20% since 2021. These achievements underscore Zambia's commitment to enhancing the well-being of women and girls, which is critical to the Commonwealth's vision of a resilient future.

Chairperson

Science, Technology, and Innovation

The Zambia Women in STEM Initiative and the Digital Inclusion Program are breaking barriers for women in technology, providing scholarships and expanding internet access in rural areas. Zambia's innovative approaches to bridging the gender gap in STEM and digital inclusion are vital to the Commonwealth's goals of fostering technological advancement and gender equity.

Rule of Law

With regard to the **Rule of Law**, it is an undeniable fact that the rule of law and the protection of human rights are critical elements for good governance, nation-building, prosperity and tranquillity. In this regard, Zambia is making deliberate effort to ensure that we uphold the principle of the rule of law.

In Zambia, we are also cognisant of the people's desires for freedom of expression and association, equality before the law. It is in this regard that I am proud to mention that, the Zambian government is working closely with the media on issues freedom of expression. However, I must caution that the enjoyment of these rights need to be exercised in a civil manner, as where the rights of one individual ends another person's rights begin.

SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE COLLABORATION AND GROWTH

Zambia is committed to building on these achievements to ensure a resilient and inclusive future. In this regard, below are some of the areas for future collaboration and growth:

1 Expanding Women's Economic Empowerment

With plans to disburse ZMW 1 billion by 2025 through the Women Empowerment Fund and intensifying efforts in agriculture, Zambia aims to enhance food security and economic growth, particularly for women in rural areas.

2 Achieving Gender Parity in Education

The Ministry of Education's goal to achieve gender parity in school enrollment by 2027 reflects Zambia's determination to address cultural barriers and improve infrastructure, ensuring equal opportunities for all children.

3 Scaling Up Science and Technology Initiatives

The expansion of the Zambia Women in STEM Initiative and the establishment of tech hubs will further bridge the gender gap in technology and innovation, empowering women to thrive in the digital economy.

4 Strengthening Cybersecurity and Political Participation

Continued enforcement of the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act, coupled with new political codes of conduct, will create a safer and more inclusive environment for women in politics.

Challenges and Proposed Solutions

While Zambia has made substantial progress, challenges remain, particularly in combating GBV, addressing economic inequality in rural areas, and ensuring women's full participation in politics. To overcome

these challenges, Zambia plans to strengthen community engagement, expand economic programs to marginalized areas, and enforce laws protecting women's rights. These in our view are areas where strong collaboration with the Commonwealth which must be explored

Conclusion:

As we reflect on the significance of Commonwealth Day, we must also look ahead to how we can deepen cooperation between the Commonwealth, Italy, and the Vatican for the benefit of all our peoples. Whether through economic diplomacy, cultural exchanges, climate action, or governance reforms, there is much we can achieve together.

For Zambia, dating back to 1979 when we became the first African country to host CHOGM. the Commonwealth has always been a platform for solidarity, progress, and shared aspirations, and one to which we attach great importance. As we embrace the future, we must continue to strengthen these ties, ensuring that the Commonwealth remains a force for peace, prosperity, and mutual respect.

Your, Excellencies, distinguished guests, Zambia stands ready to contribute to this vision of a stronger, more united, and more impactful Commonwealth.

I thank you!!!!