

An epistle to Zambians: A Centennial Birthday Tribute to President Kenneth David Kaunda.



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The Peacemaker

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

In life it’s edifying to remember those who have inspired us to be noble and President Kaunda was such an inspiration.

Sunday 28th April 2024 marks the centennial birthday of President Kenneth David Buchizya Mutepa Kaunda, our Founding Father and First President of Zambia. In celebrating the centennial of his birthday we thank God for the life and gifts He endowed President Kaunda with, making him a great statesman of our time who enriched Zambia, Africa, and the world, as a peacemaker. A peacemaker who sought love where there was hatred; unity where there was division; and peace where there was war.

As a peacemaker he led Zambia’s struggle for independence. And on attaining independence, spearheaded our economic, educational, industrial, technical, and scientific development, that his name became synonymous with Zambia.

The Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1970 when President Kaunda received the Jawaharlal Nehru Award in New Delhi said of him: “In the life of every nation, there are occasions when its ethos is identified with one man, who rises above oppression and degradation and wages a struggle against them, and by his suffering and sacrifices, inspires his fellowmen to liberate themselves. Such a man is Kenneth Kaunda, the founder of modern Zambia.” President Kaunda was such a man.

He was also a great pan Africanist. He morally, materially, financially, and militarily, supported the liberation movements of countries under colonial and apartheid oppression.

He gave refuge to the ANC and SACP of South Africa, FRELIMO of Mozambique, MPLA of Angola, SWAPO of Namibia, ZAPU and ZANU of Zimbabwe by making Zambia their home.

It was a great sacrifice for Zambia in the phrase of an English journalist it was the “high price of principles”. The support of the liberation movements cost Zambian lives, damaged infrastructures, and impacted the economy. Yet the sacrifice was morally the right thing to do in the spirit of pan - Africanism.

I recall President Kaunda's reflection of Zambia's sacrifice and the positive outcome it achieved. He told a story of his facilitation of the talks between the Portuguese government and Frelimo in Lusaka; which resulted in the Lusaka Accord also known as 'Victory Day'; now a public holiday in Mozambique.

He said: "At the meeting of the Portuguese government and Frelimo at our State House in Lusaka, when I called the meeting to order, I said, to both teams, " Dear brothers and sisters, Zambia's task is done. We have been instruments of bringing you here together.

We thank God for this. Now, this matter is left in your hands. I beg to leave you to continue with the meeting."

Samora Machel reacted quickly and said, "We want you to stay there." And, indeed, the Portuguese delegation seconded that move. They wanted me to chair the Portuguese and Frelimo talks on the freedom of Mozambique. That is how Zambia was given the honour of presiding over that extremely important meeting. In the end, peace was agreed to by everybody present."

Such was President Kaunda the peacemaker.

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan at the White House described President Kaunda as one of Africa's senior and most respected statesmen who played an admirable role in international events and whose counsel was highly valued.

Indeed, President Kaunda was one of the most admired and respected leaders of Africa in the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth, SADC, and United Nations because he was a man of principles. He spoke truth to power so if the action of any country violated a particular principle, Zambia condemned it or at the UN he voted against that country, irrespective of whichever country it was.

President Kaunda was a man of honour, integrity, and truth, who strove for peace and human dignity in Zambia and abroad.

We celebrate his life on the occasion of his centennial. And as Zambians we need to pause and reflect on his life and the values that informed it. We do so to learn, appreciate, and embrace what inspired him to be the great leader he was who put the welfare of the Zambian people first. A visionary who rendered selfless service and sacrifice to make Zambian lives better.

In pausing and reflecting we learn it was his belief in God that was the essence of his greatness and inspiration to serve the Zambian people. His parents taught him about God whose love is the great force at work in our lives. President Kaunda believed in God as a Presence not a philosophical concept. He was aware of God's Presence and that he was never alone.

President Kaunda knew too that he was a steward of the powers and talents he possessed; answerable for the use or abuse of them to God who had loaned them to him and would one day require a full account. As a believer in Christ he knew his faith was politics in the sense the French poet and writer Charles Péguy perceived it: "Everything begins in mysticism and ends in politics."

True politics is faith in practice.

This was the core of President Kaunda's politics which he often spoke about summed up in what Jesus Christ said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" And "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

This inspired President Kaunda's life in politics. Its importance is reflected in his book, 'Letter To My Children' which of all his books, is a masterpiece in self-scrutiny. He dedicated it to his children and the youth of Zambia teaching them values that matter and by which he lived.

Looking to the future he wrote, "When you grow up, you will hear and read a lot about Kaunda; what he did and didn't do; his mistakes and weaknesses - and I hope you will hear a few good things as well." It's the "few good things" I highlight and impress on you my fellow Zambians especially the young generation in celebrating this his centennial.

Of the "few good things" many of the young Zambians have no idea about is that Zambia was prosperous and had industries which were destroyed after President Kaunda left office.

Many young people think Zambia has always been poor as it is now. Not true. We had a robust agricultural programme with cooperatives and grain storage facilities across Zambia.

Many young Zambians think it's impossible to have industries and a vibrant economy and that we can live in a corrupt free country because they have never experienced this.

Many young Zambians have no idea that we had the Livingstone Motor Assembly plant, Mulobezi Timber plant, Cashew nut farms in Western Province, Mwinilunga Pineapple canning factory, Kawambwa tea factory, Mansa battery factory, Munushi Banana, Chipata bicycle factory, Kapiri Mposhi glass factory, Pottery factory in Kitwe, clothing/blanket factories in Kabwe and Livingstone, respectively. All these were Zambian run factories besides the foreign owned factories such as Colgate factory, Dunlop (tyre) factory, and many more. All these industries existed when Zambia was under great economic and political pressure and out of moral principle could not trade with the most vibrant economy in the region, South Africa.

It's important we remember and learn of these "few good things" which UNIP led by President Kaunda built. This was all possible because of discipline among all those who worked under President Kaunda as he himself was a disciplined and principled leader who did what he did for the benefit and interest of Zambians.

I hope the young Zambians will appreciate and embrace not only who we were but what we are capable of doing if we work together under the values that President Kaunda espoused.

I hope as Zambians we too can live out the values as its' only a life informed by faith and moral values that has meaning and worth.

Values inspire us to live a good life. To do the right things. They are an essential moral compass that keep us from straying and losing ourselves in life. They make us better people.

Moral values live and can only be passed on to others if they live in our lives. That is, we must humanise and incarnate them in our lives only then can our legacy be assured.

President Kaunda humanised the values of love, justice, integrity, and peace, to pass on, in what he termed the philosophy of humanism. He opposed injustice, racism and oppression as its contrary to our humanity made in God's image.

We are all God's children irrespective of religion, colour, creed, gender, tribe, or nationality. We are all one in God. We are all equal. We are all blessed to have a wholesome and fulfilling life. This is what moral values teach us.

In celebrating President Kaunda's centennial we are acutely aware that Zambia seriously needs the ethical leadership he exemplified. It needs the moral values he lived by.

We are losing these moral values and we need to rededicated ourselves to them afresh; to be awakened and stirred anew to pursue love, peace, justice, unity, and the appreciation of our rich diversity. In losing moral values Zambia is disintegrating as leaders deficient in ethical values are prey to arrogance, hubris, greed, hate, intolerance, tribalism and lies.

President Kaunda's values inspired hope and building a better Zambia for all. In celebrating his centennial we honour the values of our founders and commit ourselves to also building a better Zambia united in peace, justice, and equitable economic prosperity.

This is possible by returning to spiritual values: that is, the love of God and each other which we have abandoned by deluding ourselves to be a Christian nation buried in the Constitution.

We need to return to ethical leadership anchored in truth, love, and inclusivity. Zambia needs honest men and women of integrity in the executive, judiciary, legislature, and fourth estate.

Integrity is rooted in vulnerability as we learn from President Kaunda life. He was not perfect. He himself acknowledged, "his mistakes and weaknesses". He was as President Nelson Mandela defined a saint "a sinner who keeps on trying." Such was President Kaunda.

So, in spite of his vulnerabilities his leadership was of integrity, truth and love, in a Zambia proudly anchored on the solid foundation of inclusivity of: One Zambia One Nation.

In celebrating his centennial with hope and joy we fondly remember the significance of his white handkerchief which he waved at people everywhere he went in Zambia and abroad.

It signified a dove a symbol of peace and his waving of the white handkerchief was both a prayer for peace and a blessing of people to be wholesome.

The peace he sought for Zambia and the world is in Hebrew shalom. This is richer and more multifaceted in meaning than the English equivalent understanding of peace.

For shalom as peace speaks of complete well-being, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual; and flows from having a right relationship with God, with oneself, and with others.

This is peace or wholesomeness. This is the peace as a peacemaker President Kaunda sought for Zambia to be a wholesome nation; and sought for Africa and the world to be wholesome too.

Finally, in his honour as we commemorate his centennial we recommend to the Bank of Zambia to print on our highest denomination the 100 Kwacha note a portrait of President Kaunda as befitting tribute to him.

President Kenneth David Kaunda was a great man and its befitting that UNESCO has included him on their list for the celebration of anniversaries for 2024 - 2025, for his 50 years contribution to peace in Southern African.

On his centennial we thank God for gifting Zambia and the world a peacemaker. May we as Zambians in commemorating his centennial be blessed by God to be in our time peacemakers at home and abroad.

“The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.”

One Zambia One Nation.

God bless Zambia.

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*As published in the *Zambian Observer**

https://zambianobserver.com/an-epistle-to-zambians-a-centennial-birthday-tribute-to-president-kenneth-david-kaunda/#google_vignette

*...and *Pan African Visions**

<https://panafricanvisions.com/2024/04/an-epistle-to-zambians-a-centennial-birthday-tribute-to-president-kenneth-david-kaunda/>