

September 21, 2007

President Kaunda's Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the First Lubuto Library

Madam President:

Hon Minister:

Your Excellency the U.S. Ambassador to Zambia:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am deeply honoured to be invited to open the Lubuto Library at this historic Fountain of Hope Street Kids Drop-in Center. When I received the invitation, I was struck by a number of things. Principally, the hosting organization - 'Fountain of Hope', a place of refuge for street kids and orphans, whose parents had died of AIDS. Second, the name of the project-- Lubuto Library Project is indeed a source of enlightenment. This great service to the orphans and other vulnerable children will go a long way in answering to the needs of many in our country still living in darkness overwhelmed by ignorance, disease and exploitation by the greedy and powerful. The project has also potential to meet the needs of the young and the old yearning for light, for knowledge to access to the best that Zambia and the world offer in the 21st Century.

As a teacher, I see the potential for strengthening the efforts of the Government in improving the levels of literacy in the country. As a leader, I am excited by the prospects it offers to the millions of Zambians who will have access to the service this project will provide. So I wholeheartedly congratulate you, Madam President, for conceiving such a noble and brilliant idea. To your entire team both here and the United States which has worked hard to bring the project to fruition and made the opening of the first Lubuto Library possible, I also say: congratulations.

The Lubuto Library Project has great significance to the twelve million people in Zambia. We have tremendous challenges in meeting the Millennium

Development Goals to which Government is committed. But the catchment area for children who should be in school is so huge.

School places are inadequate. The result is that thousands of children are squeezed out of the school system at a tender age, thrown into the cold and cruel world without hope in their futures. Worse still, many young girls fall prey to idleness and become victims of early pregnancies and early marriages. Even some in school fallout and join the victims of fate. Their future is destroyed. In a crime-ridden world which offers them no hope, many young children also fall prey to antisocial behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse and even stealing. Yet many of these kids are brilliant with qualities to excel in their performance in and outside class, and have the potential to make tremendous contribution to the development of their communities and the country. Instead of advancing their leadership potential, enhancing and utilizing their inherent skills to exploit the vast rich natural resources in their communities and nation, they wallow in poverty and degradation.

The Lubuto Library Project provides an opportunity to children, starting in Lusaka and Kitwe, to access knowledge and valuable information for personal development and self-fulfillment. Libraries as vast reservoirs of productive information provide opportunities for education. For as you know, there are books that entertain, books that inform and pass knowledge and books that change people's lives. Libraries are the home of such powerful instruments for development. Think of the Bible, the Koran and many other books on faith in which moral values are deeply rooted and form the basis of a stable and *humane* society.

I am delighted that your plans include rural areas beginning with Nabukuyu East of *Monze*, where I attended a Workshop on fighting poverty last year. Rural areas face an educational crisis of major proportions which needs to be resolutely addressed; but this should not be left to Government alone to tackle. As responsible citizens, we must each play our part.

So let me appeal to Zambians to develop the culture of reading. We inherited a strong culture in oral history, but regrettably we are not a reading nation. Yet vast amounts of knowledge, useful creative information that can change you and me are still in the print media, in black and white,

in books and magazines. A lot more is available in the electronic media, but for a variety of reasons, this is still the privilege of a few. In addition, most of the best books are still In English. We must face the challenge of the millions of children who can neither read nor write in English or any local language. They are truly disadvantaged, truly poor. They present a serious challenge to society, especially educationists and national leadership. We should not have a nation in which the majority can neither write nor read in any

language. Let us challenge the nation's writers of books in local languages to produce even more creative and inspirational works in all languages that will help people open opportunities for access to the best that our country and the world offer to defeat poverty and create hope for a bright future for all.

Lubuto is therefore most welcome. Let us get into the Libraries and grow in knowledge and power for the good of our country and mankind. No one is too old to learn to read. Only last week, a unique senior citizen of this world made history in South Africa. At the age of 101 she graduated from a literacy class! She was on television practicing the art of reading: A E I O U. NA NE NI NO NU. She had a mission, developed a passion for education and learned to read. You could see the excitement on her face. This is your challenge and mine. Follow her and you will come out of the darkness that blurs your vision and keeps you in the vice-grip of poverty.