

**Keynote Address by Commonwealth Secretary-General, The
Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, at the Peace Pledge Signing
Ceremony of the Coalition for Peaceful Elections in Zambia
*Lusaka, 14 July 2021***

Your Royal Highness,

Excellencies

Distinguished

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a privilege to share this
important moment with you today.

Allow me to start by expressing my profound
gratitude to the co-conveners of the Coalition for
Peaceful Elections in Zambia, the Zambia Centre
for Interparty Dialogue (ZCID) and the Church

Mother Bodies (CMBs), as well as the entire membership of the Coalition for Peaceful Elections in Zambia, for making this important event possible.

I am greatly heartened by the coalition's continued dedication and quest to promote peace among Zambians in the context of the 12 August 2021 general elections. With your collective determination to preserve Zambia's peace and national unity, I am hopeful that the peace and non-violence pledge that will be signed today by Zambia's political leaders, will mark the beginning of robust and peaceful debate

amongst brothers and sisters towards ensuring violence-free elections in Zambia.

As I indicated in my keynote address during the launch of the Coalition for Peaceful Elections in Zambia on 1 July, elections should be an opportunity to engage in political debate over issues and perspectives and not a platform for trading insults and blows. For democracy to flourish, it is imperative that political parties and institutions embrace transparency, accountability, and respect for the rule of law.

I wish to thank Zambia's political leaders present here today at this ceremony to reaffirm their

commitment to a peaceful Zambia.. Peace is an expensive commodity which we must always guard jealously. Let us applaud and support their commitment to democracy, upholding the integrity of the constitution, and commend them for their courage and fortitude in adhering to these noble aspirations.

The promotion of peace is the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in Zambia's democracy. However, the symbolism of leaders converging together, signing a pact, and being seen by their followers to speak peace to the nation and placing the nation ahead of their personal ambition, cannot be overemphasised.

Political leaders have a moral duty and responsibility to educate their members and supporters in order to prevent militancy, violence and civil strife.

Today's peace pledge signing ceremony is truly an achievement to be admired and celebrated - and one which we would hope to see encouraged and emulated in the wider Commonwealth family. Zambian leaders are once again at the forefront of fostering peace, unity and socio-political cohesion.

While we collectively remind ourselves of the core values and principles that underpin the Zambian nation as articulated in Article 8 of the Constitution, I would also like to reflect on the words of His Excellency President Kenneth Kaunda, the Father of the Zambian nation:

“Today more than ever before man is in desperate need of weapons of peace. For peace is, for all of us, a priceless commodity. We are the best weapons of peace. We must build peace where it has been destroyed’.

Since independence, Zambia has been a fulcrum of peace in the region. For the past 30 years, Zambia has been a model of peaceful and multi-party political transitions.

The modern state of Zambia was not born from violence; the efforts of Kenneth Kaunda ensured that Zambia's independence and the values were to be defined by peace, stability, and political tolerance.

The late President Kaunda was a man who knew when to compromise, when to stand firm, and when to stand aside. When he lost his election in

1991, he did not resist; he stood aside gracefully, and in doing so ensured for Zambia a legacy of peaceful democratic transition upon which successive governments have built.

Democracy in Zambia has been hard-fought, but never violently. Despite a history of elections being contested, parties have sought to avoid extreme violence, and instead, have maintained trust in Zambia's institutions. It is important for that trust to be constantly built and sustained.

There is opportunity to consolidate Zambia's democratic gains and to continue to build upon

them - a process which continues at this gathering today.

Continuing progress towards embedding such a political culture depends on there being widespread appreciation of the traditions and principles of freedom, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

By signing this peace and non-violence pledge, Zambia's political leaders are committing themselves to writing a new chapter in the country's future growth and prosperity - a chapter which we can all be proud of.

This pledge, which the leaders are about to

commit themselves to, before the people of Zambia that they aspire to serve, will be tested ahead of the elections, on Election Day, and after the elections, in particular after the results are announced.

We will not shy away from an appreciation of the current difficulties and challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, it is exactly because of this that we have to continue on the path of democracy - because despite its difficulties, it offers us the best platform for managing our plural societies

and delivering on the benefits of good governance.

The Commonwealth is committed to working with you throughout this electoral period and beyond to assist with addressing the root causes of challenges to peaceful elections in Zambia.

Electoral violence is a symptom whose real cause must be addressed through long-term, post-election reforms. The successful implementation of this coalition experience would pave the way for an inclusive, post-election dialogue on comprehensive reforms that would help offer a buffer against violence in future elections.

Stand united. Elections will come and go, but Zambia, this great nation, will remain. The people of Africa and the global community need the light of peace and democracy in Zambia to continue shining.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to borrow the last two stanzas of your National Anthem, as I conclude:

Africa is our own motherland,
Fashion'd with and blessed by God's good hand,
Let us all her people join as one,
Brothers under the sun.
All one, strong and free.

One land and one nation is our cry,
Dignity and peace 'neath Zambia's sky,
Like our noble eagle in its flight,
Zambia, praise to thee.