

Press Release 20th of March 2008

Government remains silent on NGO Bill, despite promising to collaborate with the NGO sector

Eight key National NGOs, amongst them Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), Non Governmental Organisation Coordinating Committee (NGOCC), the Zambia Council for Social Development (ZCSD), the Zambia Land Alliance (ZLA), Caritas Zambia, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), Southern African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (SACCORD), and the Zambia Social Forum (ZSF) met in order to discuss the way forward on the NGO Bill.

The NGOs that gathered urge Government to ‘reopen’ dialogue on the deferred 2007 NGO Bill. After the NGO Bill Conference in November 2007, where more than 100 NGOs attended, recommendations on a more appropriate, fair and just NGO regulation were formulated and submitted to the Ministry of Justice. Various attempts at meeting with the Ministry of Justice have so far failed, which has raised fears that the deferred NGO Bill will merely be resubmitted to Parliament in its original form, without including the recommendations from civil society.

The NGOs present at the meeting, therefore, call on Government to urgently and publicly ‘reopen’ dialogue on the NGO regulation to ensure that the NGO Bill that goes to Parliament is fair and just, includes recommendations submitted by civil society organizations and to ensure that any regulation that is adopted will promote and not restrict the work of NGOs.

During the NGO Bill conference held in November 2007, the Honourable Minister of Justice, Mr. George Kunda, emphasized that Government would openly consult and listen to the ideas coming from civil society concerning the NGO regulation. The deferment of the NGO Bill by Parliament was partly a consequence of the lack of prior dialogue between both parties. The eight NGOs gathered hope that dialogue with civil society will be “re-opened”, and that the recommendations from civil society will be incorporated into the revised NGO Bill before resubmission to Parliament. This will surely build a strong government and civil society cooperation that is essential for building a strong development future for all Zambians.