

Caleb M Fundanga: Corporate social responsibility in Zambia

Speech by Dr Caleb M Fundanga, Governor of the Bank of Zambia, at the Launch of the Mukuyu Tree (Slave Tree), Kabwe, 23 December 2006.

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- The Provincial Minister of Central Province
- Hon. Sydney Chisanga, MP
- Hon. Rev. Gladys Nyirongo, MP, Minister of Lands
- Hon. Kakusa, MP
- Your Worship, the Mayor of Kabwe, Mr Richard Yumbe
- The Deputy Mayor of Kabwe, Mr Edward Phiri
- The Town Clerk, Mrs Vivian Chikoti
- Distinguished Invited Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good afternoon to you all.

It gives me immense pleasure to be here this afternoon in the town of Kabwe, which also happens to be the place in which I spent my childhood.

As you are aware, we are here to celebrate the occasion of the lighting of the legendary MUKUYU TREE, popularly known as the Slave Tree.

For many of you Kabwe residents present here, especially our senior citizens, this tree rekindles many happy memories of joyous occasions such as Christmas, Independence Day and Labour Day, when the TREE would shine brightly after being adorned with beautiful multi-fluorescent lights for all to admire.

The MUKUYU TREE is one of Zambia's national monuments. Its history spans more than a century of being part of the lives of the community in this area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This historic monument invokes memories of a sad but important aspect in our beautiful country's history. This experience, unfortunately, did not only affect us here, but the whole continent and beyond, touching lives far and wide.

I am referring to the infamous Slave Trade Era. Historians, time and again, narrate to us tales of how this wonderful tree was used as the resting place for our forefathers, who were captured into slavery as they were marched across this land, being traded as commodities from Africa to far away lands. It is now common knowledge, rather than myth, that our fore-fathers were being traded under this same spot on which we stand today, proud and free.

After the abolition of the Slave Trade, the TREE attained a new significance as a "rendevous" or meeting place. It was from under this very tree that some of our fore-fathers were recruited and taken to fight in the First and Second World Wars.

As mentioned earlier, later came the happy times of celebrations at Christmas, Independence Day and Labour Day.

In the year 2002, the Bank decided to recognize the historical significance of the Mukuyu Tree and depicted it on the highest denomination of Zambian currency, the K50,000 banknote.

It was therefore a matter of concern for us when the Tree and its surroundings fell into a deplorable state due to the Municipal Council's inability to meet the financial obligations attendant to its maintenance as a historical monument and national heritage site. The Bank therefore decided to adopt the Tree as part of its corporate social responsibility.

Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen

The Bank of Zambia decided to formally adopt the MUKUYU Slave Tree as an on going project under its Corporate Social Responsibility Programme. Substantial resources, both human and otherwise, have gone into this project. The Bank's aim was to assist Kabwe Municipal Council leaders to firstly restore the tree to some form of heritage status. Further, the Bank wanted to preserve and secure its

immediate surroundings in order to provide a place of rest and recreation for members of the public. The exercise was also aimed at restoring levels of beauty and elegance to the MUKUYU TREE, thereby not only rekindling its former glory, but also hopefully contributing to Kabwe's efforts to set a firm foot on the road to economic recovery through the much-heralded tourism sector.

With our humble efforts, we hope that the MUKUYU Tree is now fit to be a real "meeting place" to provide a place of rest for members of the public who wish to seek refuge under its large and leafy shade. Additionally we hope that this initial humble step has contributed to the restoration of the beauty and elegance of the MUKUYU TREE to its former glory.

It is, therefore, my pleasure to be here today not only in my capacity as Governor of the Bank of Zambia, but also as a Zambian citizen, to celebrate and commemorate this occasion which takes us back to many years in history.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me take this opportunity to say a few words about the phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility. Corporate social responsibility has become an integral part of conducting business in most internationally acclaimed and world class organizations and institutions, of which the Bank of Zambia is striving to become. The acknowledgement of the importance of corporate social responsibility, in my view, has come about as a result of most corporate bodies realizing that they actually have more than just a little responsibility towards the communities in which they exist and do business. After all, these same communities cannot be distanced from any economic activity, just as one cannot live without the other.

Let me, in this regard, take this opportunity to urge all Commercial Banks, Non-Financial Banking Institutions and other corporate bodies that are involved in community work and corporate social responsibility to please continue assisting the needy. There are numerous projects that are in dire need of assistance.

And to all those corporate bodies that are actively engaged in corporate social responsibility programmes, allow me to commend you and urge you not to relent in your efforts to bring the communities you serve closer to you.

Distinguished Guests

I hasten to add that the Bank of Zambia has not been alone in this project to restore the MUKUYU TREE. The Bank has partnered with the Kabwe Municipal Council leadership with whom we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This MOU outlines the accountabilities of the various parties. For Kabwe Municipal Council, the main accountability and responsibility will be to maintain and preserve the tree and its surroundings to ensure that the area is well protected and cleaned.

The Bank has also worked closely with Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO) who have kindly facilitated the provision of power to enable us light the MUKUYU TREE on a continuous basis. We have also worked closely with the National Heritage Conservation Commission whose input has been invaluable in providing insight into the history and status of the MUKUYU TREE as a national heritage site.

On behalf of the Bank of Zambia Board of Directors, senior management and staff and indeed on my own behalf I wish to thank all our partners for the good cooperation and oneness of vision that has culminated in the commemoration and re-launch of the MUKUYU TREE today.

Distinguished Guests

Before I conclude my speech, I wish to pose a challenge to the general members of the public and in particular to the people invited to grace this occasion today. The MUKUYU TREE has been identified and depicted as a national monument under the Laws of Zambia. By this assignment the tree belongs to all ZAMBIANS, young and old alike. My challenge to you all is to cherish it and preserve it. For the younger generation, I encourage you to learn more about the tree so that you can in turn learn to cherish the freedom that you have today in memory of all our forefathers who were sold into slavery many years ago. For our senior citizens, I request that you pass on the tales of the MUKUYU TREE which have been passed on to you from one generation to another so that the spirit of the MUKUYU TREE continues to live on.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

On our part, the Bank of Zambia Board, Management and staff are committed to the MUKUYU TREE project. We shall ensure that the process that we have started does not end here. The MUKUYU TREE is depicted on the K50,000.00 note. It has also been featured on the Bank of Zambia Christmas

card for 2006. There are long term plans to erect a kiosk which will house an information desk for information dissemination to both local and foreign tourists. The kiosk will also sell refreshments.

My request is that we all work together to protect and preserve an important part of our national heritage, the MUKUYU TREE popularly known as The Slave Tree.

I thank you for joining us at this great occasion and I wish you all a Merry Christmas, and a Happy 2007.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU.