



SPEECH

BY

**THE PRESIDENT, HIS EXCELLENCY,
DR E. D. MNANGAGWA**

AT

**THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 31st JUNIOR
PARLIAMENT SESSION AND COMMEMORATION OF
THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD**

HARARE CITY SPORTS CENTRE

16 JUNE 2023

Director of Ceremonies;

Vice President and Minister of Health and Child Care,
Hon. Gen. (Rtd) Dr C. D. G. N. Chiwenga;

Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Adv. J. F. N.
Mudenda;

President of the Senate, Hon. M. M. Chinomona;

Minister of Defence and War Veterans Welfare, and
Chairperson of ZANU PF, Hon. O. C. Z. Muchinguri-
Kashiri;

Minister of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation,
Hon. K. Coventry;

Other Hon. Ministers here present;

Chief Secretary to the President and Cabinet,
Dr M. J. M. Sibanda;

Senior Government Officials;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Members of Parliament here present;

Your Excellency the Junior President of the Republic of
Zimbabwe, Neville Mavu;

UNICEF Country Representative, Dr Tajudeen Oyewale;

Members of the Children's Parliament here present;

Teachers and school children here present;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a pleasure to be with you today at this official opening of the Junior Parliament and celebrations for the Day of the African Child. The fact that an extensive election process was conducted across all provinces, where thousands of children participated to choose representatives of this year's Children's Parliament, is commendable.

I congratulate the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation, complemented by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, for providing the leadership required for our young people to participate in matters that concern

them. This is in line with tenets of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

I also congratulate you, Your Excellency the Child President, Neville Mavu, and Members of the Children's Parliament for this successful Session and for landing the leadership posts that you now hold.

Madam Speaker;

My Government is committed to uplifting the lives of young people who are the future and backbone of our economy as well as vanguard of our nation. Today's young people must prosper in the land that we fought hard for and won its independence as well as sovereignty.

The remarks by the Speaker of the Junior Parliament and President of the Junior Senate remind us all that we are masters of our own destiny, capable of and expected to make our own laws that govern us and the decisions we make. The growing relationship between the Parliament

and young people is indeed evidence of a Government which has young people at heart.

Madam Speaker;

Members of the Children's Parliament raised a number of matters which have already been addressed by members of my Cabinet. You have heard for yourselves the interventions being made by my Government in response to some of the pertinent issues you raised this morning. I now call upon Members of the present Child Parliament to familiarise themselves with our Constitution as well as the various statutes of our nation in relation to children's rights and responsibilities. Studying these instruments will not only help you in the appreciation of what has been done so far, but it will also inform and invite suggestions on identified gaps that need improvement.

My Government is also developing youth institutions targeted at addressing the needs of our young people. The recently acquired Zimbabwe Youth Council offices

will be fully equipped to meet your needs. With immediate effect, the Youth Council must decentralise in line with our devolution policy. This will enhance your ability to consolidate views that come from the grassroots, that way ensuring that no one and no place is left behind. Furthermore, all our young people will have enhanced access to Government programmes and benefit from them, regardless of their location. **Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo, Ilizwe lakhiwa ngabanikazi balo.**

In fulfilment of our commitment under the United Nations Sustainable Development Corporation Framework, Government will continue to collaborate with development partners, including from the United Nations Organisation, particularly those with a mandate to support child protection, education and skills development. This cooperation should be in line with Government priorities and respect our cultural norms and values.

While such sector partnerships continue growing from strength to strength, I invite the private sector to partner Government in improving our education sector.

Madam Speaker, Mr President;

As alluded earlier, today we are also commemorating the Day of the African Child, which is running under the theme “the Rights of the Child in the Digital Environment.” The new normal brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in millions of children increasingly relying on online tools, systems and platforms.

The resultant use of the digital environment greatly enabled and enhanced children’s access to high-quality inclusive education, including reliable resources for formal, non-formal, informal, peer-to-peer and self-directed learning.

When used properly, the digital world promotes our children's right to culture, leisure and play, which are essential for their well-being and development.

Furthermore, the use of digital technologies such as computers, mobile phones and the internet can help to increase children's participation at the local, national and international levels. Therefore, awareness of, and access to, digital means for children to express their views must be promoted and supported.

The digital environment also opens new avenues for children with disabilities to engage in social relations with their peers, access information and participate in public decision-making processes.

In this regard, my Government is implementing policies and programmes to ensure that each and every child has equal and effective access to the digital ecosystem in ways that are meaningful for them and also in their best interests.

However, increased reliance on the digital environment is opening up new ways to perpetrate violence against children, by facilitating situations in which children experience violence, exploitation and abuse, among others. Risks relating to content, contact, conduct and contract also exist. Measures are, therefore, being implemented and strengthened to prevent the abuse of children through the elusive virtual world.

It is also against this background that I direct the Ministry responsible for ICTs to seriously review the submissions by the Children's Parliament and come up with recommendations for policy and legislation. Addressing children's rights, their concerns, views and ideas with regards to their rights in the digital environment must be one of your utmost priorities.

Madam Speaker;

The drug and substance abuse menace continues to hound our society, including young people. Under the 2nd

Republic we will not tolerate our young people engaging in drugs. As such Government is instituting various measures towards eliminating the scourge of drug and substance abuse.

I challenge our young people in the Junior Parliament to take the lead in fighting drug and substance abuse in both schools and communities. Other vices such as bullying and neglecting the ethos of hard honest work in pursuit of quick money are also frowned upon. We expect the Children's Parliament to lead its peers in positive behavioural change initiatives.

Discipline must be internalised and exercised. You must tell and teach yourselves that: "I will not do this, it is wrong. I will not take drugs, it is wrong."

Madam Speaker;

I wish to conclude by thanking the Junior Members of Parliament here today, who have committed themselves to

speaking and taking positive action, on behalf of their peers, who have not been able to attend physically. I was impressed by the manner in which the children expressed themselves, including their articulate presentations on their views and feelings.

The Members of the Children's Parliament here present are assured that my Government has taken note of all their concerns and recommendations. The relevant arms of Government are directed to look into these issues.

Equally, it is my expectation that a framework must be established to ensure that the outgoing members of the Junior Parliament continue to be active participants in our national development agenda. We must harness their skills, knowledge and experiences as we march towards our Vision of a prosperous and empowered upper middle income economy by 2030.

It is my sincere hope that when members of the Junior Parliament return to their respective constituencies, they will be able to report back fully. It has been a lovely day, very educative and informative to us all. I wish you all journey mercies as you return to your respective provinces and homes.

With these remarks, it is now my singular honour and privilege to declare the 31st Session of the Junior Parliament officially open.

God bless you.

God bless Zimbabwe.

I thank you.