

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON
COPPERBELT UNIVERSITY CLOSURE
BY

THE HON. MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, PROF. LUO, MP

Mr Speaker, let me take this very rare opportunity to render a ministerial statement on the closure of the Copperbelt University (CBU). I shall endeavor to inform this House what caused the closure of CBU and what has protracted the reopening of the University.

Sir, it is very important that I give a brief background and the sequence of events that occurred with regard to this matter. This is in order to refresh the memories of this august House and the nation at large, in case people have forgotten.

Mr Speaker, the university was to conduct early sessional examinations from 1st April to 5th April, 2019. There was a group of students who had failed their continuous assessments and demanded that despite failing their exams they be allowed to write the sessional examinations. This is against the university senate regulations that stipulate that a student had to have obtained at least 50 per cent pass of their continuous assessment before they could write examinations.

Sir, from the onset, let me inform this august House that in the week preceding the riots, CBU management had engaged the student leadership and informed them that the decision relating to continuous assessment and examinations was a preserve of the senate, to which students are represented and are party to. As such, any decision to address the demand could only be reversed and be considered by senate. The students were further informed that this provision is a standard procedure for all universities all over the world, and reversing it would compromise the quality of education and lower the status of the university.

Mr Speaker, further, the Vice-Chancellor had met student leaders prior to the protests to explain the importance of writing exams and following university regulations. This was after having received information that the students had called for a class boycott and put in place a black

Monday protest where they would all dress in black. The student actually attempted to sit for exams after discussions with the Vice-Chancellor, but upon being informed of the outcome of the discussions with the university management, they blocked entry to examination rooms. After some commotion, the student's leadership called for a meeting in the multi-purpose hall where the bulk of the examinations were taking place, thereby disrupting the whole examination set-up. Soon afterwards, they gathered at the monk square where they later decided to trek to the Jambo Drive Campus and a riot ensued after a confrontation with the Zambia Police who had already gathered by the main gate. The students rioted and damaged the cafeteria, and looted all the supplies that were in the cafeteria and the nearby shop.

Mr Speaker, it should be noted that the procedure for holding meetings was not followed, therefore, the students gathered illegally. Following this riot, the students demanded for a meeting with CBU Vice-Chancellor and also called me as Minister of Higher Education for a meeting. I agreed to meet the students on Wednesday 5th April, 2019 as I was working on the Copperbelt. Following their meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, the students agreed to proceed to write exams unconditionally. They dropped the boycott idea and the first examinations took place the following morning of Monday 1st April, 2019.

In the afternoon, the students called for a boycott and started blocking the entrance to the examination hall. They also continued with violent protests. Since His Excellency the President of this Republic, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu was on duty in Kitwe on Tuesday, 2nd April, 2019, the student representatives requested for a meeting with him. During this meeting, the student representatives apologised for their riotous behaviour which led to the damage of the cafeteria and looting of cafeteria provisions. They assured His Excellency the President of this Republic, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu that this kind of behaviour would not repeat itself.

Mr Speaker, since these students had a scheduled appointment with me the following day, 3rd April, 2019, His Excellency the President referred them to me for further discussions. The student leaders assured him that their concerns would be resolved on a round table. Despite the assurances to the Head of State, His Excellency, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, on 3rd April, 2019, the students escalated the riots resulting in extensive damage to the school infrastructure and

innocent people's property. They broke the office of the Dean of Mines, the Vice-Chancellor's office, the Council office, the Academic office and the lecture rooms of the School of Built Environment and the School of Mines and Mineral Sciences.

Mr Speaker, during that period, I was at Sherbourne Hotel waiting for the students for an appointment. So, instead of coming for the appointment, they chose to go and damage more property. The next plan these students had was to go and burn the multi-purpose facility, which was being used for examinations and meetings. This riot, which occurred on Wednesday, 3rd April, 2019, where the students extensively damaged property, was very unfortunate because we had an agreed meeting at Sherbourne Hotel.

Sir, as I sat there from 1900 hours to 2100 hours waiting for them, only to receive a phone call informing me that the students had rioted and damaged school property. I asked the police to keep vigil so that no further damage was caused to property. On 4th April, 2019, I visited the university to assess the situation on campus, in the company of senior management staff, security wings and senior staff from the Ministry of Higher Education. During my visit, the students continued to exhibit unruly behaviour and shouted that they wanted the university closed. I also had an opportunity to see the extensive damage that had been caused to the university property. As I had earlier indicated, the lecture theatres of the School of Built Environment and the School of Mines and Mineral Sciences, the office of the Dean of Mines, the Vice-Chancellor's office, the Counsel Office and the Academic Office were extensively damaged.

Following the visit to the university, I held consultations with our security wing which advised that should the university continue to be open, it would risk both the public and private infrastructure. We were also told that it would lead to possible loss of lives. This left the Government with no option but to close down the university on 5th April, 2019 to secure the safety of innocent lives and property. Consequently, I announced the closure of the Copperbelt University (CBU).

Mr Speaker, let me remind this august House that when a similar riot happened at the University of Zambia (UNZA), we lost a life. Those who were there, were not blamed for that loss of life