

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2020

**CEJ EMBARKS ON A PROJECT TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT CIVIL SOCIETY HUMAN RIGHTS VOICES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (2030) ZAMBIA**

The Centre for Environment Justice (CEJ) has embarked on a Project that is seeking the 'Promotion of Civil Society Human Rights Voices in Zambia's efforts in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030'. Through this project, CEJ desires to contribute to the creation of a multi-stakeholder platform where civil society, relevant actors, and Government collaborates to plan, implement and monitor progress in realizing targets of the Sustainable Development Goals that relate to the sustainable management of the environment and natural resources.

The organization has lined up activities including media collaboration, SDGs symposia, and Parliamentary liaison that are aimed at mentoring and inspiring young people and leaders to support efforts in this global campaign to safeguard natural resources. CEJ acknowledges that targets no 13 and 15 of the SDGs in particular place sustainable development of natural resources, protecting the environment, promoting peace, justice, social stability and harmony among people in order for countries including Zambia to revitalize their economies.

CEJ is however and further reflecting on the focus of Report of the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations General Assembly during the Seventy-third session, the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and in particular item 74 (b) whose agenda was the "Promotion and protection of human rights." Considering our belief, that a safe environment as a basic fundamental human right and that individual children, youths, women, men and the general population have the right to access quality and accurate information on Extractive Industries, Environmental Conservation and protection, Sustainable Energy, Climate Change and Agriculture, the organization reiterates that one of the priorities of the Seventy-third session of the UNGA was to consider approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

CEJ came up with this project, convinced that a safe environment is a basic fundamental human right and our children, youths, women, men and the general population in Zambia, who include Civil Society Actors, have the right to protect the environment. We share the common concerns of stakeholders, government, and citizens that the country is no longer exempt from the dangers of floods, drought and desertification which other countries on islands, countries with low-lying coasts, and countries in arid and semi-arid areas faced. It is no doubt that the increase in both frequency and intensity of droughts throughout Zambia has become a reality due to adverse effects of climate change. And based on records from 1960 to 2003, CEJ has noted that the situation is not any better as recent

climate trends indicate mean rainfall over Zambia has decreased by an average rate of 1.9 mm/month representing 2.3% per decade since 1960. This is a serious threat to water security, hydro power generation, and agriculture as it is adversely impacting on the economy and livelihoods of people in both the rural and urban. Food and water security, the quality of water, and the supply of energy have become a challenge.

The organization is taking note that the UN in formulating the SDGs whilst paying attention to sustainable environment management, it also recognized the challenges faced by civil society actors in the campaign. This is according to the Report of the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations General Assembly above, which during the Seventy-third session included on its agenda the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and in particular the “Promotion and protection of human rights.” CEJ is of the view that this is very important to countries like Zambia where mining and extraction of minerals and fossil fuels are the lifeline of the nation. Civil society actors and citizens in Zambia are on record of showing interest and advocating for space either by lobbying, researching, data collection, and even litigating against seemingly unsustainable mining activities in protected areas, which has moved the courts to intervene. This has been in the interest of helping the country manage the environment and natural resources, according to Section D, of the SDGs.

As an organization, our mission is to empower, enhance and strengthen environmentally challenged communities, youth, children, women and men by involving them in promoting environmental justice and sustainable management of natural resources. CEJ is confident this project will contribute to the creation of a safe and enabling environment for proponents of environmental protection who desire to see the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and promote the SDGs targets no 13 and 15, and Zambia’s commitments to the UNFCCC.

We would like to take the opportunity and pay tribute to the Government of Zambia for providing the necessary political will for taking the SDG environmental management campaign far by making Zambia a member of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It is commendable that the government signed the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) Agreement of 2015 which guarantees Zambia the financial support needed towards climate change effects mitigation and adaptation measures. The organization is elated that signing the INDCs agreement makes Zambia to be entitled to funding of US\$ 50 billion by the year 2030 which should be invested towards mitigating climate change adverse conditions. 35 billion USD will be provided from its external partners, and Zambia has agreed to contribute \$15 billion from domestic sources. For such measures to yield benefits, the contribution of Civil Society Actors, including youths, and local communities that are tirelessly campaigning for strengthened environmental sustainability, cannot be overemphasized. They need everyone’s support freedom, and access to information especially in those cases where they are urging Government to ensure very restrictive and stringent non-extraction policies in protected areas like the National Parks, and heritage sites of the country.

