STATEMENT BY HONOURABLE DR JOSEPH KATEMA, MP, MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING SERVICES AND CHIEF GOVERNMENT SPOKESPERSON OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA
AT THE 36TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION

NEW YORK

28TH APRIL, 2014
Madam Chairperson,

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to address this high level gathering.

Zambia aligns itself with the statement read by the Plurinational State of Bolivia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

From the outset, I wish to congratulate you and the entire bureau on your election. I wish to assure you of Zambia's continued support.

Madam Chairperson,

Allow me to convey our deep-felt appreciation to Member States for electing Zambia to the United Nations Committee on Information Bureau to represent the African Group for the period 2013 to 2014 during the opening of the 35th Session of the Committee on Information here last year.

Furthermore, my delegation and I express our sincere gratitude to the United Nations family here for the honour and privilege bestowed on Zambia by electing the country last month, as Chair of the 32-Member Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) for a two year term.

The Government and people of Zambia are humbled by this gesture and pledge to continue working closely with fellow Member States in making the world a better place to live in.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Zambia takes this opportunity to congratulate the Department of Public Information (DPI) for the important role it continues to play in fostering global peace and understanding through information dissemination among nations.

We also applaud the Department’s tireless efforts to bridge the digital gap between developed and developing countries in creating a just and balanced global information and communication order we yearn for.
Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Zambia is grateful to the Department of Public Information for its timely dissemination of deliberations and activities of the United Nations to Member States and the international community through radio, TV and websites.

Furthermore, Zambia hosts one of the United Nations Information Centres (UNICs). The United Nations Information Centre in the Zambian capital Lusaka has been in operation since 1975. The centre provides important information services to the public that range from responding to general inquiries about the United Nations, research facilities and reading space to internship for college and university students.

It is Zambia’s resolve to continue supporting the operations of the centre with rent-free office premises and other facilities so as to enable it continue to play its role effectively as the public face and voice of the United Nations.

My Government would like to strengthen its cooperation with the DPI for the benefit of our people.

Madam Chairperson,

Zambia, like fellow Member States gathered here, remains a strong proponent of freedom of expression, freedom of the media and public access to information, as fundamental pre-requisites for sustainable social and economic development and democracy.

In this regard, the Zambian Government has embarked on a wide range of measures to reform and reposition the country’s media industry so that it plays its full and rightful role in national development.

Principle among the measures is the ongoing process to enact the Access to Information Bill. Some call it Freedom of Information, others call it the Right to Information or Access to Information.

Whatever the term, the bottom line is that we are talking about one and the same thing: legislation that recognises your right and my right as a citizen, to access public information.
At the heart of this *right* is the recognition that in a democracy, the Government is only the custodian of information and its true owners are the people.

Among other merits, the Access to Information law, enhances public scrutiny and participation in national affairs and helps in combating corruption and wrongdoing by those entrusted with the custody of public assets and interests.

**Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Zambia has also liberalized the airwaves to enhance public sector investment and participation in the development of the media industry. From one state owned radio and television station in 1991, Zambia now has over 70 community and commercial radio stations and no less than 10 television stations on air countrywide.

This is in addition to several private newspapers and magazines, both print and online, which have significantly widened and deepened public access to information.

We have also established the Independent Broadcasting Authority, a statutory body responsible for investment and management of the country’s broadcasting sector.

And, riding on Government’s ‘hands-off’ approach in the operations of the media sector, journalists and other media practitioners in Zambia have since formed an independent, non-statutory and self-regulatory mechanism to promote ethical and professional conduct among themselves.

**Madam Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Zambia, like other Member States, is also on course to migrate from analogue to digital television broadcasting as prescribed by the United Nations International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

These and other measures, represent the Zambian Government’s unwavering commitment to providing a conducive environment for the growth of a free, professional and independent media in the country.
Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Information is key for any Member State to achieve sustainable Development in view of an enlightened population. To this effect, I wish to call on all stakeholders to aid in ensuring universal access to information through enhanced Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

ICT is prohibitively expensive for developing countries with double to triple costs for the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs).

My delegation, therefore, calls upon this August House to work collectively for universal and affordable access to ICT.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Zambia renews its support to the United Nations global agenda for a well-informed populace. Working together, success is not in doubt.

In conclusion, my delegation looks forward to successful deliberations of the 36th Session of the Committee on Information.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you.