

Media Statement

Date: 30 May 2017

Contact person: TN Shaanika

Subject: Impounding of Namibian trucks by the Zambian Government

During February 2017, a number of Namibian trucks contracted by various customers to transport timber from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were intersected and impounded by the Zambian authorities once they entered the Zambian territory. The goods on those trucks were NOT harvested in Zambia but by businesses operating in the DRC with valid permits from the Government of the DRC to do so. The Namibian truckers were simply transporting goods from the suppliers to the clients and were never involved in the harvesting of the timber.

We understand that the Mukula timber which caused the impounding is prohibited to be harvested in Zambia but not in the DRC. Our trucks carried timber from the DRC with valid documentations which were inspected by Zambian customs officials and found to be valid and authentic. The Zambian authorities even sealed the cargo at the Kasumbalesa border post between DRC and Zambia which under normal circumstances would be inspected again at the Sesheke-Katima Mulilo border post.

Despite the valid and authentic documents which our drivers had and despite the Zambian authorities having satisfied themselves at the board that the trucks were carrying goods legally, the same Zambian authorities still impounded trucks. While the harvesting of makula timber is not permitted in Zambia, the Zambian law never disallowed such timber to be transported on Zambian roads until April 2017 when they reportedly passed a law preventing the transportation of macula timber on Zambian roads. This law was enacted and implemented retrospectively which is neither normal nor legal. The NCCI has engaged the Zambian and Namibian authorities on several occasion to resolve this dispute diplomatically and amicably

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Chief Executive Officer: T.N. Shaanika **Company Secretary:** C.M. Mwiya

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but these efforts did not yield any results. Our trucks remain impounded illegally by the Zambian Government.

As a result of the impounding, our drivers have been living in deplorable and inhumane conditions in Zambia for the past five months, far away from their families. Our members (the trucking companies) lost a lot of money totalling close to N\$ 100 million (a hundred million Namibian Dollars). Their trucks have been standing in Zambia without generating income and some of our members are at risk of losing their businesses all together.

It is important to understand that the Walvis Bay – Ndola – Lubumbashi corridor was developed to promote trade within the region and with the outside world. A lot of efforts were made to promote this transport corridor. On the 5th of March 2010, the Governments of DRC, Namibia and Zambia signed an agreement which established the Walvis Bay – Ndola – Lubumbashi Development Corridor and since then, we have seen a significant growth in the movements of goods along that corridor.

Unfortunately, there were also more goods destined for Zambia and DRC from the Port of Walvis Bay in comparison with goods from Zambia and DRC to Namibia or to the outside world via the Port of Walvis Bay. One of the products identified to be transported as a return load from the DRC to the Port of Walvis Bay was timber and the main market destination was China. A number of trucks from various countries, primarily Namibia, Zambia, DRC, Tanzania and South Africa started taking timber from the DRC as a return load.

It is unfortunate and regrettable that the Zambian authorities decided to impound trucks for such a long time instead of impounding the products which they were trying to protect. The impounding of our trucks has harmed our economy severely, at the time when our economy is already not doing well. There is clear evidence of the impact of the impounding of our trucks on the transport and logistics sector in Namibia. There is currently a lot of cargo that cannot be transported out of the Port of Walvis Bay due to lack of trucks because so many of them are kept standing in Zambia.

The timber crisis that we are now experiencing could have been avoided if there was effective communication amongst SADC member states and especially the signatory to the Walvis Bay – Ndola – Lubumbashi Development Corridor Agreement. The Zambian Government implemented laws affecting the operations on the corridor without consulting other member states as required by the agreement they signed in Livingstone in March 2010. In fact, the Zambian Government has violated that very same agreement.

As a representative body for businesses in Namibia, we demand an immediate release of our trucks unconditionally. We further urge the Zambian and all other Governments which are party to the Walvis Bay – Ndola – Lubumbashi Development Corridor agreement adhere to this agreement strictly in order to ensure that the corridor plays its rightful role in the development of trade within SADC.

Issued and signed on behalf of NCCI by:

Tarah N. Shaanika
Chief Executive Officer