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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Date: 8<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

### **FPI CALLS ON PRESIDENT HICHILEMA TO WITHHOLD ASSENT TO CYBER BILLS**

The Free Press Initiative (FPI) Zambia is deeply concerned with the recent passage of the cyber bills by Parliament, which are now awaiting President Hakainde Hichilema's assent.

We strongly urge the Head of State not to sign these bills into law at this stage, as they represent a missed opportunity to meaningfully reform Zambia's digital legislation in line with democratic principles, media freedom, and the protection of fundamental human rights.

As FPI, we find the proposed amendments to the existing Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act lacking substance and progressive transformation. In their current form, these bills retain many of the troubling and draconian provisions in the principal legislation enacted in February 2021.

Despite promises for reform and wide consultations, the recently passed bills have failed to address these long-standing concerns. Key issues such as the vague definition of "cyber offenses", the sweeping powers granted to security agencies, and the lack of sufficient checks and balances remain unchanged.

These elements pose a significant risk of abuse, particularly in the current digital era, where freedom of expression and the right to access information are paramount for democratic governance and accountability.

We, therefore, appeal to President Hakainde Hichilema to demonstrate his government's commitment to democratic renewal and media freedoms by withholding assent to these bills. Additionally, we urge to remind President Hakainde Hichilema that the Cyber Bills he opposed in 2021 whilst he was in



opposition are not different from the Cyber Bills he is yet to approve and pass into law.

Thus, we call for an open, inclusive, and transparent review process that engages a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including media bodies, civil society organizations, digital rights advocates, the legal fraternity, and ordinary citizens.

Cyber space must be governed by clear, fair laws and rooted in the values of freedom, dignity, and accountability, not fear and control. Zambia deserves cyber legislation that protects citizens from genuine cyber threats without undermining their constitutional rights.

We remain hopeful that the President will exercise his authority in the interest of democratic integrity and the future of free expression in Zambia.

**Issued by:**

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