

By MARGARET SAMULELA

RAILWAY Systems of Zambia's investment in Zambia has hit a US\$50 million (about K250 billion) mark, the company's chief executive officer Benjamin Even has disclosed.

In a joint statement with Railway Workers Union of Zambia president Gravel Musonda, Mr Even said the investment is likely to increase following the Patriotic Front's victory last month.

"Our investment plan which has hit approximately US\$50 million by now since 2004 is continuing as planned and if new policies will be implemented, the pace of investments will be increased," the statement reads.

Mr Even and Mr Musonda pledged full support to Government, which they said has progressive ideas for the railway sector in Zambia.

"RSZ is very optimistic with the change of government, we can see a new spirit of action-oriented government which we believe can only boost and create more confidence in the private sector," the statement further reads.

It further states that the PF manifesto on the sector is progressive as it encourages private sector investment.

Mr Even and Mr Musonda pledged full support and co-operation to the new government in dealing with future economic challenges facing RSZ and the railway sector.

"It is our wish that the new PF Government will pay particular attention to the railway sector which has been facing some major challenges for some time. The government of Zambia must honour the concession agreement for the sake of the Zambian economy and RSZ employees, and should support our sector with implementation of transport policies which will make the railways more competitive in order to shift traffic from road to rail.

"These are mainly reflected in the road levy refunds, support towards security and road regulations to be enforced such as weight limitations and toll gates," the statement says.

Mr Even said the company is facing challenges such as huge outstanding debts from neighbouring countries' railways which are estimated at US\$6 million and about US\$5 million of paid road levy which has never been refunded.

He also said vandalism has continued to haunt the company.

"Addressing such matters will benefit us all as opposed to creating a wrong impression in the public which could lead to major risk for this concession; this was observed in other railway concessions and companies which have recently failed in the region," Mr Even said and added, "money is not easy to come by but is a direct result of hard work and responsibility of each and every employee of the company towards its targets, assets and image. We all want more, but without this, it will never come. Our role is to work hard and plan while the Government should support us with the right policies."

On media reports over sub-contracted employees in Ndola, Mr Even and the union president clarified that these are not employees of RSZ. They said the workers were engaged by a contractor of RSZ.

"For the record, internal investigation has revealed that contrary to the report, this contractor is paid well above the government stipulated minimum wage per employee on a monthly basis. Invoices and payments could be presented to the relevant authorities upon request. It is only a pity that some individuals are taking advantage of the current political situation for various reasons," the statement says.

