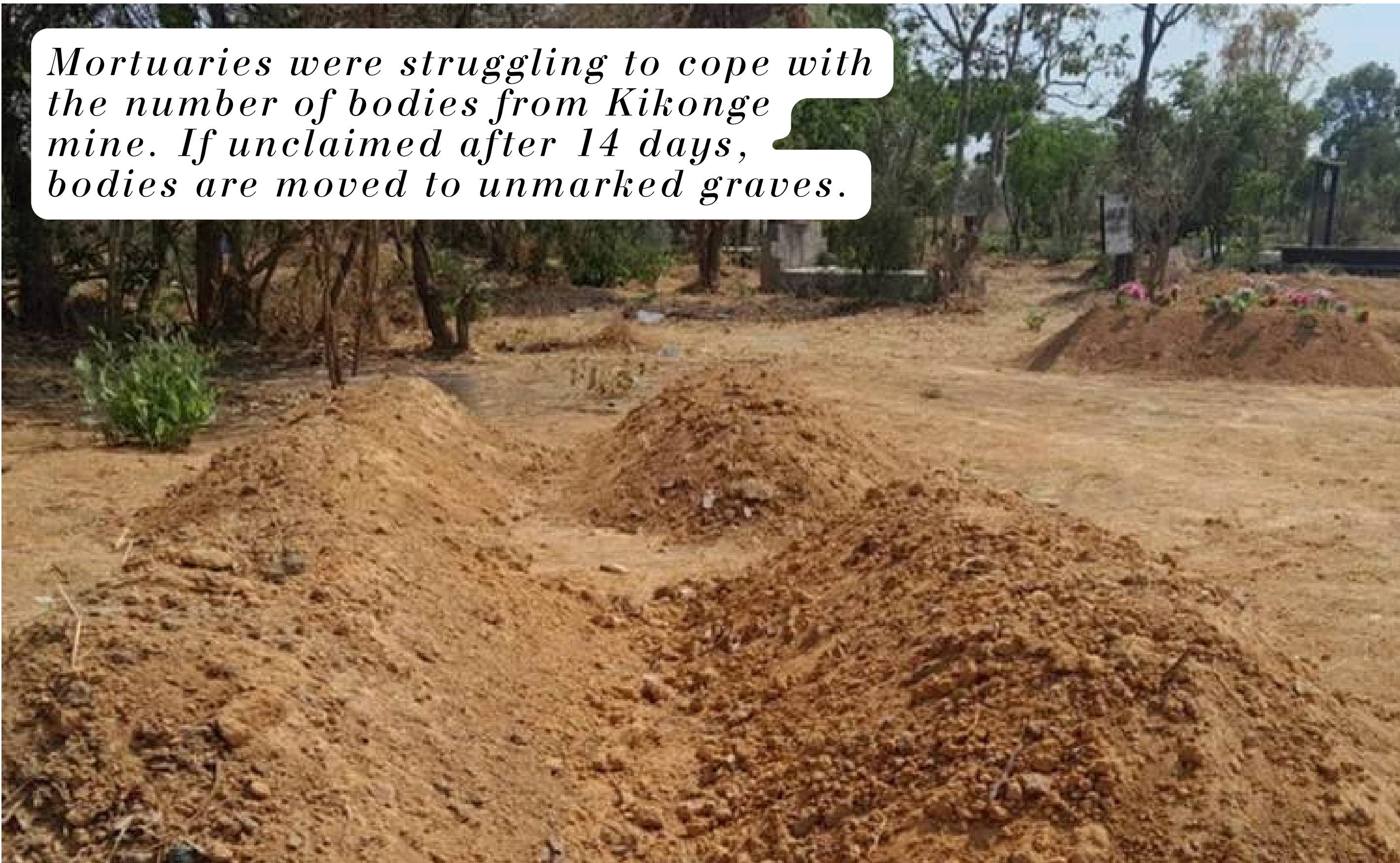


Guns, Gangs and Gold: The dark side of Zambia's gold discovery

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Mortuaries were struggling to cope with the number of bodies from Kikonge mine. If unclaimed after 14 days, bodies are moved to unmarked graves.



When news of a violent gold rush in Kikonge reached MakaanDay, veteran investigative journalist Charles Mafa knew it demanded deeper investigation. He assembled a small team of local journalists familiar with the area to uncover how a discovery meant to bring prosperity had instead sparked chaos, fueled by gangs and guns. The team uncovered a dark side to the discovery, one marked by gangs, guns, and chaos – a far cry from the prosperity it promised.

Zambia's Local Content Law Wins SME Support



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**“They
Promise 60
Jobs, We Feed
3,000
People” -
Palabana
Farmers
Resist
Limestone
Mine**

Story on page 2

Zambia’s Local Content Law Wins SME Support

By Linda Soko Tembo

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Zambia have hailed the government’s newly signed Local Content Statutory Instrument (SI) as a long-overdue game changer that could finally level the playing field against foreign contractors dominating the country’s major business deals.

The SI, aimed at ensuring that citizens, goods, services, and financial benefits within Zambia are prioritized in large investment projects such as mining, is expected to significantly enhance local participation in the country’s key economic sectors.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development, the Local Content SI, signed by Minister Paul Kabuswe under the Geological and Minerals Development Act of 2025, will take effect on January 1, 2026.

Principal Public Relations Officer at the Ministry, Shamwinda Tembo, explained that the new law requires mining companies to allocate at least 20% of their procurement budgets to local suppliers for core goods and services within six months of its implementation. This threshold will progressively increase to 25% after one year, 35% after two years, and a minimum of 40% within five years.

Additionally, the regulations reserve certain categories of goods and services exclusively for Zambian-owned firms and promote the subdivision of large contracts into smaller lots to enable broader participation by local enterprises.

“To ensure compliance, mining companies will be required to submit a Local Supplier Development Programme to the Ministry and update records annually to track progress. Failure to comply will attract penalties under the Act,” he said.

Speaking in an interview, Kuzhika Limited Chief Executive Officer Nephan Kamwandi, a businessman from Solwezi District, welcomed the SI, describing it as a long-awaited legal framework to protect local entrepreneurs from unfair competition.

“In the past, we SMEs have been operating without any law to support us. There has been no legislation promoting entrepreneurship in this country. This SI is the first of its kind and gives us hope that business will finally be conducted fairly, especially with big mining companies,” Kamwandi said.

He shared personal experiences, citing instances where his company received small orders worth as little as K1,000 from major mining firms like Kansanshi Mine, while foreign-owned companies were awarded multi-million-dollar contracts.

“For me to drive from the Central Business District (CBD) to Kansanshi mine, I need about K250 for transport, and then I have to wait for that K1,000 to be paid. What kind of empowerment is that? Meanwhile, companies from South Africa or Austria are awarded contracts worth billions,” he said.

Kamwandi argued that the absence of local content laws has allowed foreign investors to dominate supply chains, sidelining Zambian businesses, especially those based in mining communities.

“Because I am local and from Mushitala community in Solwezi, I am often not given the same opportunities. These investors have been disadvantaging us. Their goal is to mine, not to empower us. But without a law to support local suppliers, they have been free to operate however they want,” he said.

He commended the government for introducing the SI, saying it will compel large corporations to engage local suppliers and foster long-term, sustainable business opportunities.

“We appreciate the government’s effort. This law will compel mine owners to deal directly with local entrepreneurs, creating valuable, long-term contracts and sustainable jobs,” Kamwandi said.

He further urged the government to expedite the identification and registration of local enterprises capable of supplying goods and services to the mining sector, suggesting that such a database would also assist foreign firms in forming partnerships with Zambian suppliers.

Kamwandi also pushed back against negative perceptions that local contractors are unreliable or incapable of meeting industry standards.

“It’s a myth that local entrepreneurs can’t deliver. When given contracts, we deliver. And if we default, there are legal mechanisms in place. The perception that we can’t be trusted must end,” he said.

The Local Content SI is expected to significantly boost the participation of Zambian-owned businesses in key sectors, particularly mining, one of the country’s primary economic drivers.

Meanwhile, Gerntina Mines CEO Moffat Mukwala confirmed that the SI was officially signed into law on October 9, 2025, at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre.

“This means that mining companies and other industries are now required to give contracts to local suppliers. The SI will transform Zambia’s business landscape by ensuring that more wealth generated from our natural resources stays within local communities,” Mukwala said.

He pointed to Mopani Copper Mines as a positive example, noting that it has already awarded contracts worth US\$73 million to three local suppliers.

“This is something huge. Now the onus is on local businesses to supply quality goods and services that meet international standards,” he said.



This week in the Bulletin and Record

“They Promise 60 Jobs, We Feed 3,000 People” - Palabana Farmers Resist Limestone Mine

By Linda Soko Tembo

In Palabana, a quiet farming community east of Lusaka, tensions are rising over a proposed limestone mine. Chinese-owned Evergreat Mining says the project will create 60 jobs. But residents say it threatens a dairy industry that supports over 3,000 people, as well as farmland and critical Zesco power infrastructure nearby.

Evergreat holds a 20-year licence for 1,236 hectares in Nkomesha Chiefdom, about 1,700 football pitches, valued at US\$5 million. However, the land is officially zoned for agriculture, and the Chongwe council previously rejected an application to convert it for mining.

Evergreat Investment and Company Limited, registered in 2019, is owned by Chinese nationals Shi Zhengyang and Qu Sen, who are listed as both directors and shareholders, according to PACRA records.

A MakanDay investigation found the proposed quarry is just 200 metres from Zesco’s high-voltage pylons that transmit electricity from Kariba to the Copperbelt.

Zesco says it will conduct a technical assessment before any mining begins. The Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) has yet to decide whether the project will go ahead.



At a public hearing on October 3, dairy farmers, youths, business owners and civic leaders debated the project. Supporters, mostly young people and traders, welcomed promised jobs. Farmers pushed back, saying the mine would destroy grazing land, pollute water, and collapse an industry that produces 11,000 litres of milk daily, worth an estimated US\$2.5 million a year.

Presenting on behalf the company, Evergreat engineer Timothy Goma said the company plans open-pit mining, extracting 83,000 tonnes of limestone per month.

“No explosives will be stored on-site. All blasting will be conducted by licensed experts and will follow strict safety and environmental protocols,” Goma assured.

He explained that the project site is located within Nkomesha Chiefdom, approximately 20 kilometres south of Chongwe town and 5 kilometres off Leopards Hill Road, near Palabana University, Palabana Market and Cross Park gated community.

But according to the company’s own Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the land-use change must still be approved before a quarry licence can be issued. Goma confirmed the first application was rejected.

After the hearing, a dairy farmer, who requested anonymity, explained that Palabana was initially established as a government resettlement scheme for dairy farming. Today, the community produces around 11,000 litres of milk each day, or roughly 300,000 litres a month, generating an estimated US\$2.5 million annually.

“While the mine is proposing to create 60 jobs, the dairy industry already supports more than 3,000 people in and around Palabana,” the farmer said.

He added that in 2023, the developer applied to the Chongwe Council to change the land use from agriculture to mining, but the request was rejected because the area is zoned for agricultural purposes.

“Now in 2025, the project has resurfaced. Despite strong community opposition, the company is still pushing to proceed,” he said.

The EIA lists possible benefits such as jobs and local business opportunities. But it also warns of land degradation, air and water pollution, noise, soil erosion and irreversible landscape changes.

The proposed site is close to informal stone-crushing activities that many families, including children, depend on for income. Residents fear they will be displaced if large-scale mining goes ahead.

While the report claims that many of these impacts could be mitigated through strong environmental management plans, it concedes that permanent changes to the landscape would be unavoidable.

The area is dotted with large quarry stones and lies close to a community where many residents rely on small-scale stone crushing for survival. Families, including children as young as 9 to 12 years old, are often seen helping to crush stones at household level. Once a large company assumes control of quarry operations, however, these local residents risk losing their only source of income.

Zesco Managing Director, Justin Loongo, confirmed to MakanDay that the power utility will conduct a detailed technical assessment before any mining begins.

“We need to have a look at the site and see what is obtaining on the ground. Before blasting starts, all necessary tests must be done to assess the impact on the surroundings,” Loongo said.

Speaking on behalf of Senior Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II, Princess Cholwe Nkomesha said the royal establishment has formally opposed the mine.

She cited the Kasisi mine as an example of how similar projects have led to air pollution and environmental degradation.

“In Kasisi, the community has not benefited despite initial promises. The mine operates 20 to 30 trucks every day, causing dust and disruption. We cannot repeat the same mistake in Palabana,” she said.

She added that the chiefdom supports development — but not at the expense of livelihoods and the environment.

ZEMA’s Acting Principal Inspector Tobias Kanyanga said the project is still under review.

“The ZEMA board, which meets once a month, will review the hearing report and either approve or reject the project. Once a decision is made, a letter will be issued explaining the reasons,” Kanyanga said.

He added that by law, ZEMA must communicate its decision to the community within 15 days after the board meeting.

“The project is still under the EIA process. The public hearing is just one component that informs the final decision,” he said.

For Palabana residents, the debate is not just about development, it’s about survival.



Guns, Gangs and Gold: The dark side of Zambia’s gold discovery

When news of a violent gold rush in Kikonge reached MukanDay, veteran investigative journalist Charles Mafa knew it demanded deeper investigation. He assembled a small team of local journalists familiar with the area to uncover how a discovery meant to bring prosperity had instead sparked chaos, fueled by gangs and guns. The team uncovered a dark side to the discovery, one marked by gangs, guns, and chaos – a far cry from the prosperity it promised.

By Charles Mafa, James Beluchi and Caleb Likomeno

“What I know (about) Kikonge is that it has brought the worst situation than development,” said Chief Kizela’s representative.

Thousands of people have flooded into northwestern Zambia seeking gold said to be buried just under the surface.

The gold rush in Kikonge has attracted gangs from the Copperbelt and Lusaka.

Violent clashes have broken out with police.

The site is on traditional land and traditional leaders have called for the army to be deployed.

Social media posts about gold buried just beneath the surface have triggered a rush of fortune-seekers into northwestern Zambia. But the ensuing gold rush in Kikonge in the vast Mufumbwe district has turned violent.

The government has promised to restore law and order but the 300 police officers sent to remove illegal miners and secure the mining sites have met fierce resistance, and are accused of taking bribes to let miners in.

The police are not responding to questions, neither is the government. Traditional leaders are calling for military intervention.

Amid this chaos, the state is pressing ahead with plans to licence small-scale miners.

The so-called Kikonge gold mine is not a formal one but an informal site about 60km from Mufumbwe town. Reports of easily accessible gold in the area surfaced on social media early this year.

By mid-year, police estimated that about 40,000 people had migrated to the area from across Zambia and from Namibia, South Africa and Tanzania.

Residents say the gold rush first brought them money from wealthy buyers and suppliers of gold detectors. But, as word spread, gangs from the Copperbelt and Lusaka arrived and have taken control, according to the police and to traditional leaders.

“When it was just us locals mining, the place was peaceful – no killings, no deep pits, only surface digging,” a young man told MukanDay. He bought a motorbike with his proceeds from mining.

“Before that, I was using my father’s bike,” he said.

A few weeks after speaking to MukanDay his motorbike was stolen.

Police at Mufumbwe police station say crime in the area is flourishing, with people fighting over gold, sometimes killing and torturing one another.

To support local police, the government deployed 300 police officers to the area in July, most of them from the Copperbelt. On 10 July, police and miners clashed, leaving two suspected illegal miners dead and 12 officers injured.

The government responded by dispatching some top brass.

Ministers who visited the area included Defence Minister Ambrose Lufuma, Home Affairs Minister Jack Mwiimbu, and Minister for Northwestern Province Robert Lihefu. They were accompanied by top security chiefs, including Inspector General of Police Graphael Musamba and Zambia Air Force Commander Lieutenant-General Oscar Nyoni.

The ministers announced a crackdown, and police proceeded with an operation to remove illegal miners and ban access to the Kikonge mine site. It’s unclear how many illegal miners were removed (police reported 25,000). But when we visited the area in late September violent clashes between police and miners were continuing.



Police from the local Mufumbwe Police Station were threatened when they entered Kikonge in September, to track down murder suspects. A senior Mufumbwe police officer told MukanDay that he had found more than 10,000 people on the mine site, locally known as “Swahili Market”. He said police had been told to leave or they would “regret” it. “In the end, it took the intervention of some gang leaders themselves, for police to identify the suspects.”

Mufumbwe police efforts are hampered by a lack of resources. Their only vehicle, a Land Cruiser bought through the Constituency Development Fund, was damaged in an accident in August, and has not been repaired. Officers must now borrow vehicles from other departments, including the national parks and wildlife department.

Without transport, local police struggle to cover a mining area 60km from their station. Illegal miners also operate in other, more remote areas to which there are often no roads.

Police accused

Kikonge is a vast area, spanning two chiefdoms presided over by Senior Chief Kasempa in Kasempa district and Chief Kizela in Mufumbwe district.

Chief Kizela’s spokesperson Labson Samola Kayombo welcomed the ministers’ visit but said traditional leaders were sidelined.

“They didn’t even want to speak to us. They said they would come to the palace. They haven’t,” said Kayombo, who says police can’t restore order because some are cashing in on the chaos.

“They’re involved because they charge people to access the mine,” he alleged, suggesting soldiers should be deployed instead.

Pressed for proof, he told journalists to visit Kikonge and hear from local residents who have been reporting this to traditional leaders.

Locals living on the Kikonge mining site handed journalists videos showing people living in flimsy shelters between gaping open pits. In one clip, a youth is heard accusing police of “charging us for access at night and chasing us away in the morning”.

The other video is too graphic to publish and shows the body of a young local boy. According to residents, he was shot by police during a raid to remove illegal miners.

Risks

When the MukanDay team arrived in Kikonge, police warned of the risks.

“No one goes to that area wearing spectacles like you. You would not come back,” an officer said, referring to spectacles being a sign of wealth.

Guns, Gangs and Gold: The dark side of Zambia’s gold discovery Cont..

The team asked for a police escort into the area. But the district commissioner ignored these requests and repeated visits to his office made no difference.

At the Mufumbwe-Solwezi road junction, about 27km outside Mufumbwe town and still 30km from the gold mining site, MakanDay found a makeshift camp of tired-looking young men and women preparing to return to the Kikonge gold pits.

Asked why they risked returning when access to the area was prohibited, one youth replied: “To survive, the police need us, that’s why we are going back.”

A Mufumbwe police officer, speaking anonymously because he is not authorised to give interviews, said the 300 police at the site are short of food, water, and other basics.

“If the government does not provide supplies – food, water, because there is no water there, they have to buy. But for a human being to survive, buying water every day from your salary is not possible. Recently, I saw them buying six 25kg bags of mealie meal here in Mufumbwe town. What is six bags for over 100 officers in one camp?” he said.

Police have not responded to questions sent to them on 30 September about allegations of corruption and using live ammunition to disperse crowds. Follow-up calls have also come to nothing.

The Ministry of Mines says mining licence holders are responsible for securing sites.

But Kikonge is on traditional land with no licence holder. The government has not responded to a list of questions about what it will do since efforts to restore law and order to the area have not worked out.

Traditional leaders say they have lost faith in the police and want the army to step in.

“We are not satisfied with the performance of the police,” said Kayombo. “The army will know how to handle civilians.”

Mortuary full

As illegal mining and crime persist, so do deaths. A senior Mufumbwe District Health Office official confirmed that bodies from mine accidents and violence keep arriving. The mortuary was full when journalists visited, and new arrivals had to be sent elsewhere.

Bodies that are not claimed after 14 days are buried in unmarked graves, mainly at the Kalende gravesite, east of Mufumbwe town.

While mortuaries struggle to cope, many deaths are not recorded. Kayombo says most of the mining fatalities are street children lured into the area by gangs. Their bodies are often buried in collapsed pits or left unrecorded after violent clashes.

A district health official agreed: “The number of dead bodies from Kikonge is even higher. Many junkies (street kids) are buried underground after the collapse of the earth while searching for gold.”



Councillor for the Kikonge Ward Moses Mangisha told MakanDay: “We are still looking for six [missing people]. Out of these six, two of them are my own brothers. It’s either they were trapped or they were killed.”

Government forging ahead

The government is issuing artisanal licences to local co-operatives to formalise gold mining and ensure local communities benefit from it. Over 100 licences have been issued so far, and Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines Investment Holdings has agreed to buy the gold.

Kayombo cautiously welcomed the move, but warned that some people might be given plots without gold, and would still have to pay taxes and file returns.

This situation will be further complicated if illegal miners are still operating in the area as they are now. While they will not pay taxes like licenced miners, licenced miners are unlikely to get access to their allotments if illegal miners are still in the area and operating as they are currently.

This week in the Bulletin and Record

UNZA’s Role in the Liberation Struggle of Southern Africa 1966-90 (Part I)

By Dr Hugh McMillan

Shortly after his release from prison in February 1990, Nelson Mandela visited the University of Zambia (UNZA) and addressed the students. His visit marked the end of the liberation struggle in the region, but his praise for President Kaunda was not what the students wanted to hear. A few months later they were prevented by the police from marching to State House to protest an increase in the price of mealie meal. They resolved to take their protest ‘to the people’. Starting in compounds near the university, riots spread all around the town and lasted for three days. They triggered a process that resulted in the end of the one-party state and the defeat of Kaunda and UNIP in multi-party elections a year later.

The establishment of UNZA in 1965-6 was a consequence of the break-up of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland at the end of 1963 and

the independence of Zambia in the following October. UNZA opened in 1966 with 300 students. The enrollment grew slowly to 3,500 students by 1990. There was a quota for foreign students who never numbered many more than five percent of the student body. The bulk of these students were from Rhodesia and South Africa.

Looking at the role of UNZA in the liberation of Southern Africa, a number of questions arise. What was the role of exile academics at the university in the first two decades of its existence? Why did issues relating to the liberation struggle become points of conflict in the major crises of 1971 and 1976? What were the links, from an UNZA perspective, between the liberation struggles of exile groups based in Zambia and the demand for democracy in Zambia itself?

Jack Simons and the ANC

The most influential academics at UNZA in the early years were exiled South Africans with links to the ANC. Jack Simons was one of the most significant intellectuals, university teachers, and political activists, to emerge from South Africa in the 20th century.

He taught African law and government at the University of Cape Town from 1937 until he was banned from teaching in 1964. He played a major role, with his wife, Ray Alexander, in the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) from the late 1930s until it was banned in 1950.

They arrived in Lusaka for the first time in May 1965 and returned in 1967 after a period of two years in Manchester. Jack Simons took up his post at UNZA as a professor of Sociology at the beginning of 1968. The Simons were to keep an open house at 250 Zambezi Road, Roma, for members of the ANC, SWAPO, ZAPU, and other liberation movements, as well as for numerous Zambian intellectuals, students and friends for most of 25 years.

Whether in Cape Town or Lusaka, or in the ANC’s camps in Angola, Jack Simons’s Socratic, questioning, method of teaching had a huge impact. He did not teach Marxism in university classes, but he did teach critical thinking and he was pleased that four sociology students were among the leaders arrested in the 1971 crisis.

UNZA's Role in the Liberation Struggle of Southern Africa 1966-90 (Part I) Cont...

He was himself the first UNZA staff member to be detained in terms of the president's emergency powers after a cache of AK47 assault rifles was discovered in a cottage on the Zambesi Road plot in August 1970. He was held for a week at Kabwe Maximum Security Prison, but was released after the intervention of Oliver Tambo, and other friends and colleagues.

He also played a major part in the political education within the ANC and Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) from the late 1960s onwards. In 1977-9, he trained political educators within MK, spending a total of nine months in the camps in Angola. In an obituary notice, Albie Sachs, the South African jurist, recalled:

His classes in the bush became so legendary that the South African military gave him the highest award any professor could ever receive, a special bomber to blast the camp where his seminars were given: an honour, I am happy to say, that he and his students received in absentia.

Another black South African academic, Ben Magubane, also a sociologist, spent three years from 1967 to 1970 at the university. He was an active member of the ANC, providing, with his wife, a safe house for its exile leader, Oliver Tambo. He was the only member of UNZA's staff to attend the ANC's important Morogoro Conference in Tanzania in 1969.

Before his departure for the United States he had begun to mount an influential critique of the practice of social anthropology, as displayed in the work of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and the related Manchester School. He was critical of the tendency of social scientists to portray Africa as static and to accept uncritically the context of colonialism and capitalist exploitation in which they worked. His use of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as a sociology text may have had a lasting influence on students through the formation of the Frantz Fanon Club, which played a part in the UNZA crisis in 1976.

Drum writers – Ezekiel Mphahlele and Lewis Nkosi

The most famous South African exile with ANC connections to serve on the staff in the early years was Ezekiel (later known as Es'kia) Mphahlele, the Drum journalist, novelist, and author of the classic memoir, *Down Second Avenue*. Mphahlele came to work in the English department at the University of Zambia in 1968 and stayed for only two years. He became disillusioned with exile politics and earned some opprobrium by returning from the United States to South Africa in 1977. His views may have been influenced by his knowledge of the in-fighting within the ANC which reached its peak in the early months of 1969. These views found fictional expression in his Zambian, and exile, novel, *Chirundu*, which was published in South Africa in 1979.

Lewis Nkosi, Drum journalist, literary critic, broadcaster, playwright, and novelist, was in the English department from 1979 to 1987. He had a more positive attitude towards UNZA and the ANC than Mphahlele of whom he was a stern critic. His inaugural lecture, 'In defence of the study of literature',

introduced post-structuralist literary theory, including the work of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, to many of his listeners. His study of African literature, *Tasks and Masks*, and his award-winning novel, *Mating Birds*, were both completed and published while he was at UNZA. The ANC's cultural journal, *Rixaka* was conceived at a meeting in his apartment. He contributed a significant article, 'Black Writing in South Africa', to its first number in 1985, repeating his earlier arguments against 'struggle writing' and anticipating Albie Sachs's later plea that writers should not regard 'their books as bullets'.

The Chikwakwa Theatre and the 1971 crisis

Under the leadership of John Reed who had taught at the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland for nine years, and was close to the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), the English department was one of the most dynamic of the new university's departments. Reed and Michael Etherton established the Chikwakwa Theatre, a 'mud theatre' in the grounds of Reed's house near the university. This was a pioneering venture in 'theatre for development'. Among its first productions was Mario Fratti's *Che!*, a play about Che Guevara and the insurrection in Bolivia, which was timed to coincide with the Non-Aligned Movement Conference in September 1970. Among the more conspicuous attenders was Raoul Castro, brother of Fidel, and a friend of Guevara.

The opening night of the next major production, Andrea Masiye's *King Kazembe and the Portuguese*, 7 July 1971, coincided with the beginning of the first major crisis in UNZA's history. There was no causal connection between these events, but the later victimisation and deportation of Etherton, and another member of the English department, Andy Horn, was an indication that the government believed that the department and the theatre were sources of unwelcome radical ideas.

The student demonstration on 7 July was a protest against the French government's decision to allow the South African government to manufacture Mirage jet fighters under licence. When tear gas failed to bring the students under control, the commanding officer fired a shot from his pistol, injuring one student. On the following day there was a larger demonstration against the police in which students marched to the Secretariat.

They were persuaded to withdraw and President Kaunda issued an apparently conciliatory statement in which, however, he said that foreign relations 'should be left in his hands'. introduced post-structuralist literary theory, including the work of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, to many of his listeners. His study of African literature, *Tasks and Masks*, and his award-winning novel, *Mating Birds*, were both completed and published while he was at UNZA. The ANC's cultural journal, *Rixaka* was conceived at a meeting in his apartment. He contributed a significant article, 'Black Writing in South Africa', to its first number in 1985, repeating his earlier arguments against 'struggle writing' and anticipating Albie Sachs's later plea that writers should not regard 'their books as bullets'.

The Zambia Daily Mail on 15 July carried a headline, 'We rule, you learn', and a UNIP placard read, 'We cannot allow a state within a state'.

A UNIP march on the campus was called off, but the university was closed down and the students were expelled from the campus – the first of many times that this happened. A demonstration over an issue of foreign policy had grown into something much more complicated - the first real test of the university's autonomy. Fundamental issues were raised relating to the governance of the university. In a long statement to parliament, Aaron Milner, the secretary-general to the government, referred to the university as public property, which had been built by 'the sweat and toil of poor people'. He was saying in effect that the university was not an independent institution.

An underlying factor in the conflict between the university and the state was the tension between Kaunda and Simon Kapwepwe, the former vice-president, who resigned from the government two months later to form a new opposition party, the United Progressive Party (UPP). Kapwepwe was arrested in February 1972 when Kaunda announced his intention to establish a one-party state. On a visit to the university soon after its re-opening, President Kaunda had told the students that they should distinguish between 'criticism' and 'opposition'. The university came to be seen from then on as a centre of opposition and was later one of the sources from which the MMD emerged in 1989-90.

This article was first published in the October 2014 edition of the Bulletin & Record magazine.



Opinion: Gold, Chaos and Cooperatives: Can a Broken System Restore Order at Kikonge?

As the nation marks its 61st Independence anniversary, we call on Zambians to pause, reflect on where we have come from, and consider the direction we are heading.

What has prompted this reflection is the government’s decision to place its hopes on cooperatives to manage the Kikonge gold mine and restore order, as we reported in our [gold rush story](#). In principle, this is a worthwhile approach, but only if cooperatives are managed professionally.

A cooperative and its members are like two sides of the same coin, neither can succeed without the other. A cooperative needs committed, trustworthy members to thrive, and members need a well-managed and transparent cooperative to benefit.

Yet in Zambia today, well-functioning cooperatives are hard to find.

Cooperatives are meant to be member-owned, with profits shared among the members. However, many have been quietly taken over by private interests — including influential individuals, who retain control indefinitely, sidelining ordinary members and undermining the cooperative spirit.

But many cooperatives are formed solely to access Constituency Development Funds (CDF), agricultural inputs and other government grants. As a result, they often become vehicles for mismanagement and the diversion of public resources, rather than functioning as productive enterprises.

The cooperative model is not new to Zambia. It has existed for more than 110 years, first introduced in 1914 by European settler farmers in Northern Rhodesia, and later strengthened after independence under the United National Independence Party (UNIP).

During the UNIP era, cooperatives flourished with strong government support, legislation, and institutions such as the Zambia Cooperative Federation (ZCF), the Cooperative Bank and the Cooperative College.

However, the decline began in the early 1990s following economic liberalisation under the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD), when government support and control were withdrawn. Since then, most cooperatives have struggled to survive or function effectively.

Studies conducted by reputable international bodies, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2009 and the International Cooperative Alliance in partnership with the European Union (ICA/EU) in 2019, both reached similar conclusions - Zambia’s cooperative movement is largely weak, poorly governed and financially unstable.

These assessments found that most cooperatives are either dormant or non-performing, lack proper leadership structures, do not hold regular annual meetings, and operate without sound financial systems. Many survive only on paper, existing mainly to access government handouts rather than to operate as sustainable, member-driven businesses.

The reports also highlighted a lack of training, limited entrepreneurial skills among members, weak regulation and little accountability.

In short, despite its long history and potential, the cooperative sector in Zambia is failing to function as a viable economic model.

Reviving the cooperative movement requires a deliberate and well-structured reform agenda. The first step is to relaunch the cooperative model for the 21st century, rather than merely encouraging the youth to form cooperatives without addressing past failures.

Reform should be guided by existing research and a review of the 2007 National Cooperative Development Policy. Institutional capacity must be strengthened, particularly within the Department of Cooperatives in the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and the ZCF, through proper funding, staffing and technical support.

Government should also draw on experienced cooperative leaders and experts to guide reforms and mentor new cooperatives. Training must be mandatory for members, leaders and employees, covering governance, financial management and cooperative principles. Without this foundation, failure is inevitable.

At the same time, politicians must stop exploiting cooperatives for personal gain. When cooperatives are used as political tools, they become instruments of manipulation rather than empowerment, trapping communities in dependency and poverty.

Sectors with the highest potential for impact, such as agriculture, clean energy, mining, tourism, finance, construction and manufacturing, should be prioritised.

Unless cooperatives are restructured and managed professionally, the current rush to form youth and women cooperatives under CDF, now even to run mines, will only repeat the failures of the past.



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Journalism is increasingly treated as a crime in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe Correspondent

State surveillance, arrests and detentions have created a climate of fear in newsrooms, and a new law will bring investigative journalism under direct state control. The effect is chilling: editors are self-censoring to protect their organisations. This is likely to make donor funding, vital to sustaining journalism, much more difficult to secure.

This year, the Zimbabwean government has arrested and charged several high-profile journalists, including the editor of the Zimbabwe Independent, Faith Zaba, head of Heart and Soul Television, Blessed Mhlanga, as well as Alpha Media Holdings editor-in-chief, Kholwani Nyathi.

Police arrested Mhlanga after his interview with Zanu PF member and war veteran, Blessed Geza, who accused Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa of corruption and urged him to step down. Mhlanga spent 72 days in pretrial detention, where he was ill-treated by the police. The trial is ongoing.

In July, the Mnangagwa administration arrested Zaba on "insult" charges for publishing a satirical political column that mocked Mnangagwa's tenure as the chair of the Southern African Development Community. Accused of undermining the authority of or insulting the country's president, Zaba was detained for three nights despite being ill and having handed herself over. Her arrest attracted widespread condemnation by journalists and Amnesty International.

Nyathi, the editor-in-chief of Zimbabwe's largest private media company, Alpha Media Holdings, which runs the Zimbabwe Independent and HSTV, was charged jointly with Zaba. The pair's trial begins on 31 October in Harare.

Last year, The NewsHawks was forced to drop an investigation into housing corruption in the military after pressure from the Zimbabwe Defence Forces and the government. Amid increased surveillance, the journalist investigating the matter had to relocate his family. The army and Mnangagwa's spokesperson, George Charamba, admitted a military investigation was underway, but warned the media house not to report on the issue, as it was a matter of national security.

The army said it would issue a public statement once its investigation was complete, but it has yet to do so.

Zimbabwe's Bill of Rights may guarantee media freedom, but journalists face the risk of arrest, prosecution, or other forms of harassment. Chris Mhike, a lawyer who is representing Zaba, Geza and AM Holdings, says this is because Zimbabwe has "too many statutes" that are at odds with the Constitution, including several provisions in the Criminal Law Code which pose a serious threat to press freedom. For example, a number of people have been prosecuted for allegedly undermining authority or insulting the president.



Mhike adds: "A raft of other media laws has worsened the situation by maintaining in our operating environment, a significant degree of fear and the apprehension of getting into trouble with the law. Even those journalists who have yet to fall victim to the harshness of our media laws often censor themselves as a measure of avoiding law-related problems."

The Interception of Communication Act is another tool the state uses for its media crackdown. It gives state security agencies broad powers to intercept phone calls and online communication. Knowing the state can easily monitor their calls, many journalists stop pursuing stories as they fear arrest.

"The process of challenging the validity of these laws is laborious and prohibitively expensive," says Mhike, who adds that journalists are often subjected to prolonged pre-trial detention. THIS was the case with Mhlanga and Hopewell Chin'ono.

"This usually serves as a reminder to all other journalists that criticism of the status quo, or any association with dissenters, can easily seriously harm the messenger [the journalist]," he said.

Other laws used to restrict journalism include the Cybersecurity and Data Protection Act (2021), which is meant to regulate data and online crime. It allows authorities to get subscriber data from telecom companies with little oversight. It also criminalises the sharing of any information deemed to be "false", which can be used to criminalise routine reporting.

The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Act (2023) goes further, making it a crime to "wilfully injure the sovereignty and national interest of Zimbabwe", which is broad enough to apply to critical journalism.

Recent changes to the Private Voluntary Organisation (PVO) Act will introduce a new regime for the way non-profit journalism must operate. Public interest and watchdog media outfits in Zimbabwe operate as non-profit organisations and receive grant funding from international partners. They must now register as PVOs in accordance with strict regulations, or face criminal prosecution.

To get registered as a PVO, the state must first interview and approve an organisation's board members. If any PVO's work is deemed not to be in the national interest, the state can replace board members, seize the company's assets or simply shut it down.

"That situation naturally leads to the loss of the autonomy that many press freedom advocacy groups and not-for-profit watchdog journalism media organisations previously enjoyed. Dozens of freelance journalists who used to rely on the resources of independent pro-media Trusts suddenly find themselves heavily constrained under the new legislative framework," Mhike says.

Njabulo Neube, the coordinator of the Zimbabwe National Editors Forum (ZINEF), says media civil society organisations are being forced to register and submit CVs of their board members.

"CVs contain intimate and private, personal details which allow authorities to have access to emails and residential addresses," he says. "[The PVO Act] allows the state to do surveillance on citizens, which is unhealthy in a democracy."

Zimbabwe Union of Journalists secretary general Perfect Hlongwane says regulatory constraints are hindering investigative journalism, particularly the exposure of corruption.

"The licensing and accreditation of journalists is also another way they use to control journalists," Hlongwane says, adding that journalists are already self-censoring.

Despite a 2014 Constitutional Court ruling that invalidated criminal defamation, journalists continue to face prosecution under broadly framed "false news" clauses for "communicating falsehoods" or inciting public violence, as was the case with Chin'ono in 2020.

Nigel Nyamutunbu, coordinator of the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe, an alliance of media support organisations, says although Zimbabwe has some progressive laws, including the recognition of freedom of expression or media freedom, it has many clawback clauses which are being used to criminalise journalism.

"We have structural issues of a political nature that need to be addressed and that point to a shrinking space and regression in the democratic discourse of the country," says Nyamutunbu.

This story was produced by the IJHUB network in Southern Africa.

The journalists name has been withheld for their safety.

Lessons From Lilongwe: What Zambia Can Learn from Malawi’s 2025 Election

By Wengo Kaluba

Malawi held a general election on 16 September, 2025, with President Lazarus Chakwera under immense pressure. It’s been a tough decade for incumbents globally, as voters across the globe have voted decidedly for a change of direction in both developed and developing nations.

This can be widely attributed to the double economic shocks presented by the COVID—19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Global inflation rose to levels not seen since the 2008 financial crisis, and if you look at most Presidential terms and elections, these economic factors presented voters with what seems like a simple choice: continue down the same path, change direction, or even in the case of Malawi, go back to what you know.

Of course, no two nations are the same.

In the US, Donald Trump bounced back arguably due to Democrats’ indecision regarding their candidate.

In the UK, the Conservative Party — who ruled for over a decade — was marred with scandals, allowing a Labour Party victory in 2024.

Closer to home, South Africa’s ANC lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since the end of apartheid in 1994.

In Botswana, the long-ruling BDP—in power since independence in 1966, was finally unseated in 2024. And in Zambia, the Patriotic Front (PF) ended its decade-long rule in 2021, when Hakainde Hichilema’s United Party for National Development (UPND) won power on a platform of economic reform and a pledge to fight corruption.

Ultimately, the latest casualty of this regional anti-incumbent wave is Lazarus Chakwera, who was decisively defeated by former President Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Mutharika secured just under 57% of the total vote — a commanding return for the 85-year-old leader whose supporters describe the outcome as “a return to proven leadership”.

As a neighbouring country and close ally, Zambia has much to reflect on as we approach our own elections in 2026. Having spent time on the ground observing Malawi’s vote closely, several key lessons emerge:

The Electoral Commission Faces a Huge Task

Elections across the continent are marred by corruption, disorderly conduct from parties and candidates from both ruling and opposition parties alike. During these periods, the eyes of the nation are all on one institution; the electoral commission in charge of overseeing results. This can be an extremely tense position depending on the nature of the election taking place, and in some cases, even dangerous. But it is the job of the respective commission of that country to carry out the will of the people without interference or influence.

In Malawi, Judge Annabel Mtalimanja, under pressure from both the ruling and opposition parties remained calm in demeanor and approach while delivering the results that ultimately saw Mutharika re-elected to Malawi’s highest office.

While there were numerous formal complaints, quarantined results, and several delays in announcing the final outcome, the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) upheld its constitutional duty to declare results within one week of voting. By the time of the Commission’s final announcement, President Chakwera and several other candidates had already conceded defeat, recognising that there was little value in contesting or obstructing the inevitable outcome. Having himself benefited from a court-overturned election in the infamous “Tippex Election” of 2019, Chakwera opted to stand down gracefully and support a peaceful transition of power.

It is worth recalling that Malawi’s 2019 election was annulled only after opposition parties presented overwhelming evidence of electoral malpractice before the courts. The judiciary’s ruling paved the way for a rerun the following year, in which Chakwera and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) emerged victorious. Ironically, during the disputed “Tippex Election,” the MEC was chaired by Jane Ansah, SC, now serving as Vice President.

The key lesson for Zambia ahead of the 2026 elections is to uphold confidence in the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) while maintaining vigilant oversight against malpractice. The Commission carries the solemn duty of safeguarding the people’s will, a responsibility that must never be taken lightly. Zambia’s consistent record of peaceful and credible elections should be preserved and strengthened through continued transparency and accountability.

It’s Time to Let Some Names Go

In Malawi, this election saw Lazarus Chakwera face not one but two former presidents, Joyce Banda and his eventual successor, Arthur Peter Mutharika.

It was a fascinating political contest, a kind of electoral déjà vu. Their campaigns told a metaphorical tale of two cities: one where a former president managed to “bounce back” from electoral defeat, and another who struggled to secure even 100,000 votes nationwide.

Beyond their shared experience in the highest office, another factor connects the two candidates, their age. Though a decade apart, Banda (75) and Mutharika (85) both sought to lead a nation whose median age is just 18.1. This is not to dismiss experience or wisdom in leadership, but it highlights a growing generational disconnect. Many young voters are weary of familiar names and the sense of dynastic politics that often comes with them.

This fatigue isn’t limited to individuals; it extends to parties as well. Atupele Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) ran a spirited campaign, especially among young people. Yet for some voters, his association with the party that ruled from 1994 to 2004 was a dealbreaker, a great driver, as some put it, with a tired vehicle. Similarly, the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), once Malawi’s second-most popular party, may have regained some relevance only because of its alliance with Mutharika’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Often, it’s not just the candidate who needs repositioning, but the political vehicle itself.

In Zambia, too, we see the same familiar faces returning to the stage. It would be refreshing to see new names and new energy injected into the political landscape. The emergence of figures such as Dolika Banda, whose entry into politics generated significant online attention — especially as a woman — points to the appetite for change and inclusion among voters.

Voters Are People, Not Numbers

Former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev once remarked, “Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build bridges even when there are no rivers.” He would know — and his words still ring true across the world today.

During the 2019/20 campaign, Chakwera charmed voters with promises focused on the economy — the issue that mattered most to them. Yet under his watch, that same economy deteriorated to historic lows. Widespread corruption, political patronage, global inflation, and the loss of trust from the international donor community — on which Malawi depended heavily — all eroded confidence in his administration.

While Chakwera did deliver on infrastructure, there’s a popular saying in African politics: “People can’t eat roads.” The same lesson applies to Zambia’s former Patriotic Front (PF) government under Edgar Lungu. Flyover bridges, airports, and stadiums may look impressive, but when citizens face rising food prices or power outages, they quickly forget the ribbon-cutting ceremonies.

Another key observation from Malawi’s election was its voter demographics. Of the 7.2 million registered voters, more than 55% were women — most of them under 35. Yet an octogenarian, backed by youthful supporters, convinced many that he was the best hope for their future. His running mate, Jane Ansah, likely played a role in appealing to women voters.

Regional dynamics also shaped the outcome. The Northern Region, which has the fewest registered voters and often feels neglected, saw through Chakwera’s last-minute charm offensive. The DPP’s alliance with AFORD — a historically strong party in the North — proved strategic, boosting Mutharika’s chances there.

Lessons From Lilongwe: What Zambia Can Learn from Malawi’s 2025 Election Cont,,,

The key takeaway for Zambia is clear, voters are not statistics, they are people. When leaders neglect their real needs, the consequences are felt at the ballot box. Understanding who voters are, where they come from, what they value, and what issues matter to them, is essential for any party hoping to earn lasting trust.

No One Can Afford Complacency

The ultimate lesson from Lilongwe is clear: no one can afford to be complacent, not the ruling party, not the opposition, not the electoral commission, and certainly not the electorate. Nothing in politics is guaranteed, as recent events across the region have shown.

While there may be no immediate or consolidated threat to President Hakainde Hichilema’s leadership, the ruling party cannot take public confidence for granted.

The 2026 elections could mirror South Africa’s experience, where the African National Congress retained overall power but lost its parliamentary majority. A similar shift in Zambia could reshape the balance of influence even if the UPND remains in government.

The opposition, too, must not rest. They need to clearly communicate what they would do differently, and how. Simply criticising the government is not enough, Zambians deserve credible alternatives and practical solutions.

Meanwhile, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), which has already begun its voter registration campaign, faces a monumental task next year to ensure the process remains transparent, efficient, and inclusive.

That leaves the electorate, the people at the heart of it all. Zambians must weigh their choices carefully and collectively decide what kind of leadership and future they want for the nation. Once that decision is made, it is the duty of all political leaders to respect and uphold it.

These lessons apply across the spectrum, to voters, candidates, political parties, and the electoral commission alike. Zambia has long enjoyed a reputation as a peaceful and democratic nation. As we move towards August 2026, it is vital that we protect that legacy and strengthen it.

Journalism with a Purpose

For nearly a decade, MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism has been supporting journalists across Zambia—training and mentoring more than 500 reporters to strengthen ethical, in-depth reporting.

This support has enabled journalists to expose illegal practices through powerful investigations. Recent stories have uncovered issues such as industrial pollution and the exploitation of child labour in gold mining operations.

“This training has opened my eyes. I now realise that I have been complicit in some of the injustices happening in my community,” said one of the 16 journalists attending the ongoing one-week investigative journalism training in Lusaka.

This training has been made possible with the support of BBC Media Action.

So far this year alone, MakanDay has trained over 50 journalists, empowering them to produce stories that inform, hold power to account, and make a difference.



Awards Ceremony

Entries Open for MakanDay Investigative Reporting Award

The Eminent Prize for Investigative Journalism is now in its fourth year. This award recognises journalists who demonstrate exceptional commitment to uncovering hidden facts and holding leaders accountable.

Deadline: 31st October 2025

A panel of independent judges will review submissions and select up to two winners.

- Overall Winner: A brand-new laptop
- Runner-up(s): A three-month, fully paid internship at MakanDay
- Honourable Mentions: Up to two may be named and invited to the awards ceremony hosted by MakanDay

Winning and finalist entries will be featured on the website <https://makanday.org> and across our social media platforms.

Submission Guidelines

- Entries must uncover abuse of power, corruption, or expose injustice.
- Journalists may submit their own work or nominate another’s work (with their permission).
- Eligible entries must have been published or broadcast between 1st January and October 31st 2025.
- Non-English entries must include a translation.
- For print entries: include a scanned copy (and, if unclear, a transcript in Word or PDF).
- For broadcast entries (TV, radio, or online video): include a link or attach the file.
- All entries must include a biography and photo of the entrant(s).
- The awards are open to all Zambian journalists and MakanDay contributors. However, MakanDay journalists are not eligible to participate.

Submit entries to: editor@makanday.org

Visit: website <https://makanday.org>

MAKANDAY

Editors

Charles Mafa
John Mukela

Layout & Design

Bwalya Chibwe

Investigators

Ennety Munshya
Linda Soko

Office Assistant

Joanna Ndabala

Contact(s)

0963507661
editor@makanday.org

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