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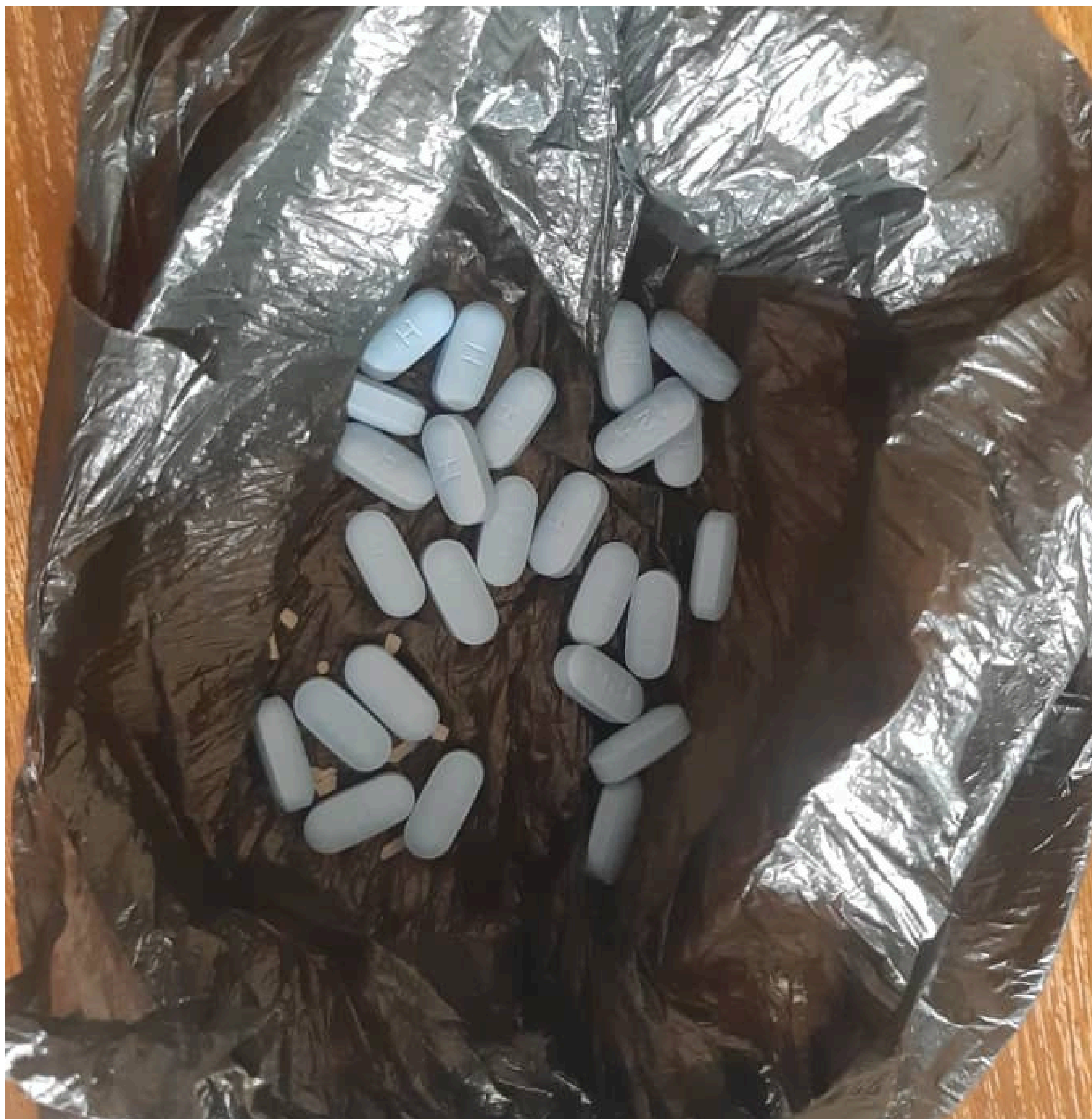
6TH - 12TH FEBRUARY 2026



ISSUE. NO 0024

Government Probes ARV Leakages Exposed by MakanDay

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Government Probes ARV Leakages Exposed by MakanDay

By Linda Soko Tembo

Following an investigation by MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism exposing the pilferage of medicines, including antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), the Ministry of Health has announced that investigations are underway to establish the facts and identify those involved.

The Ministry said the probe is focusing on the alleged diversion of essential medicines from the public health system for illegal sale at mining sites in Mpika and Kasempa districts.

MakanDay’s investigation found that antiretroviral drugs meant to be provided free of charge through Zambia’s public health system were being sold illegally for cash at remote gold-mining sites. The drugs were traded openly by unlicensed vendors in informal mining settlements, raising concerns about diversion from health facilities, treatment interruptions, and the risk of drug resistance.

In a press statement issued on Friday, January 30, 2026, Ministry of Health Principal Public Relations Officer and spokesperson Georgia Chimombo said the Ministry had received allegations that life-saving medicines intended for vulnerable patients were being diverted to illegal mining sites — a development she warned poses serious public health risks.

“If confirmed, these actions violate professional ethics and national laws, and threaten public health programmes,” Chimombo said. “Such practices put vulnerable citizens at risk by limiting access to life-saving medicines.”

She said the Ministry strongly condemns the alleged illegal sale of medicines and reminded health workers that ARVs and other essential drugs are provided strictly to safeguard citizens’ health.

Anyone found involved, she warned, will face disciplinary action and possible prosecution.

The Ministry has also urged Zambians to report suspected cases of medicine diversion to health authorities or law-enforcement agencies.

Beyond the alleged drug diversion, the Ministry raised concerns about health conditions at illegal mining sites, noting that poor access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene increases the risk of diseases such as cholera, typhoid, HIV and other infections.

“Because these areas fall outside approved service-delivery frameworks, medical support cannot be provided,” Chimombo said.

Chimombo said investigations are ongoing and announced plans for the Ministry of Health to collaborate with the Ministries of Mines and Mineral Development, Home Affairs and Internal Security, and Defence to restore order, protect public health and prevent further illegal activities.

She said the Ministry reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding medicines and protecting the health of all Zambians.



Smuggling, Bribery & Border Wars at Kipushi

By Sanjimba Kanganja | Radio Kabangabanga - Solwezi

A report by Radio Kabangabanga exposes how Zambia may be losing millions in public revenue at Kipushi Border Post in northwestern Zambia, where smuggling, bribery, and institutional conflicts are allegedly thriving.

While official figures show about K6 million collected annually, residents, drivers, and sources describe nightly movements of prohibited maize and other undocumented goods, often facilitated through bribes involving multiple border agencies.

The investigation also reveals allegations that Congolese nationals are working inside Zambian-controlled border premises, shutting out local youths and raising serious accountability concerns.

Efforts to restore order, including a new truck park under a public-private partnership, reportedly triggered turf wars that drew the attention of Hakainde Hichilema and senior ministers.

Yet key questions sent to authorities remain unanswered.

Kipushi is a small border between two countries, Congo DR and Zambia, but the revenue losses, governance failures, and public trust at stake are national.

Watch the full report on <https://makanday.org/>

[Watch the full report on https://makanday.org/](https://makanday.org/)



Rising Crime, Thin Policing

Mtendere and Kalingalinga residents caught between violence and an overstretched police service

By Brenda Muzeya

Residents of Lusaka’s Mtendere, Kalikiliki, Kalingalinga and the Presidential Housing Initiative (PHI) townships are living with daily fear, as violent and property crime surge and an understaffed police service struggles to keep pace.

Earlier this year, MakanDay reported how medical students living in Mtendere and PHI were coming under siege, facing repeated attacks, robberies, and intimidation around boarding houses and student hostels near Levy Mwanawasa Medical University.

That report exposed delayed police response, poor night patrols, and growing fear among students, warning signs, residents say, of a deeper and widening public safety problem.

This story builds on those findings, drawing on police crime data and interviews with residents to show that the insecurity documented among students is not isolated.

Across surrounding high-density neighbourhoods, residents report a familiar pattern, crimes are reported, arrests are sometimes made, but cases frequently stall, are withdrawn, or quietly disappear from the justice system.

Data obtained by MakanDay through a press query to the Zambia Police Service now reveals the scale of the challenge. In a single year, police posts serving Mtendere, PHI, Kalikiliki, and Kalingalinga recorded dozens of murder, assault, theft, and burglary cases, even as police acknowledge they lack the manpower to adequately prevent crime or see investigations through to conclusion.

Between January 1 and December 31, 2025, police posts under Mtendere police station serving Kalikiliki, Kalingalinga, and Mtendere recorded more than five murder cases, 106 assault cases, 55 theft cases, and 19 burglary cases. While arrests were made in some incidents, a significant number of cases were later withdrawn or stalled,

raising questions about investigative capacity, follow-through, and justice for victims.

The numbers, and what they don’t show

According to police statistics shared with MakanDay:

- Murder: over 5 cases, with arrests reported
- Assault: 106 cases, 62 arrests, 11 cases withdrawn
- Burglary: 19 cases, 5 arrests, 2 withdrawn
- Theft: 55 cases, 34 arrests, 4 withdrawn

While the figures point to persistent criminal activities, they also expose a deeper problem. Not all reported crimes translate into prosecutions or convictions. Withdrawn cases, in particular, often signal lack of evidence, or victims losing confidence in the justice process, dynamics police statistics rarely explain.

In percentage terms, the police data points to uneven progress across cases. Of the 106 assault cases recorded, 58.5 percent resulted in arrests, while 10.4 percent were withdrawn, leaving 31.1 percent unresolved. Burglary cases showed the weakest outcomes. Only 26.3 percent of the 19 cases led to arrests, 10.5 percent were withdrawn, and nearly 63 percent stalled without resolution.

Theft cases performed better but still revealed gaps, with 61.8 percent of cases resulting in arrests, 7.3 percent withdrawn, and almost 31 percent remaining unresolved. Police data on murder cases was less precise, reporting arrests but not providing exact case numbers, limiting a full assessment of progress and accountability.

Residents interviewed by MakanDay described a familiar cycle. Crimes are reported, arrests are sometimes made, and then communication and follow-up quietly fade away.

“We reported the cases, but nothing has happened,” said Mirriam Zulu, a medical student and victim who was interviewed for an earlier report. “Police ask for transport to go to the scene. We don’t see patrols at night.”

Police explanations: poverty, alcohol, and ‘junkies’

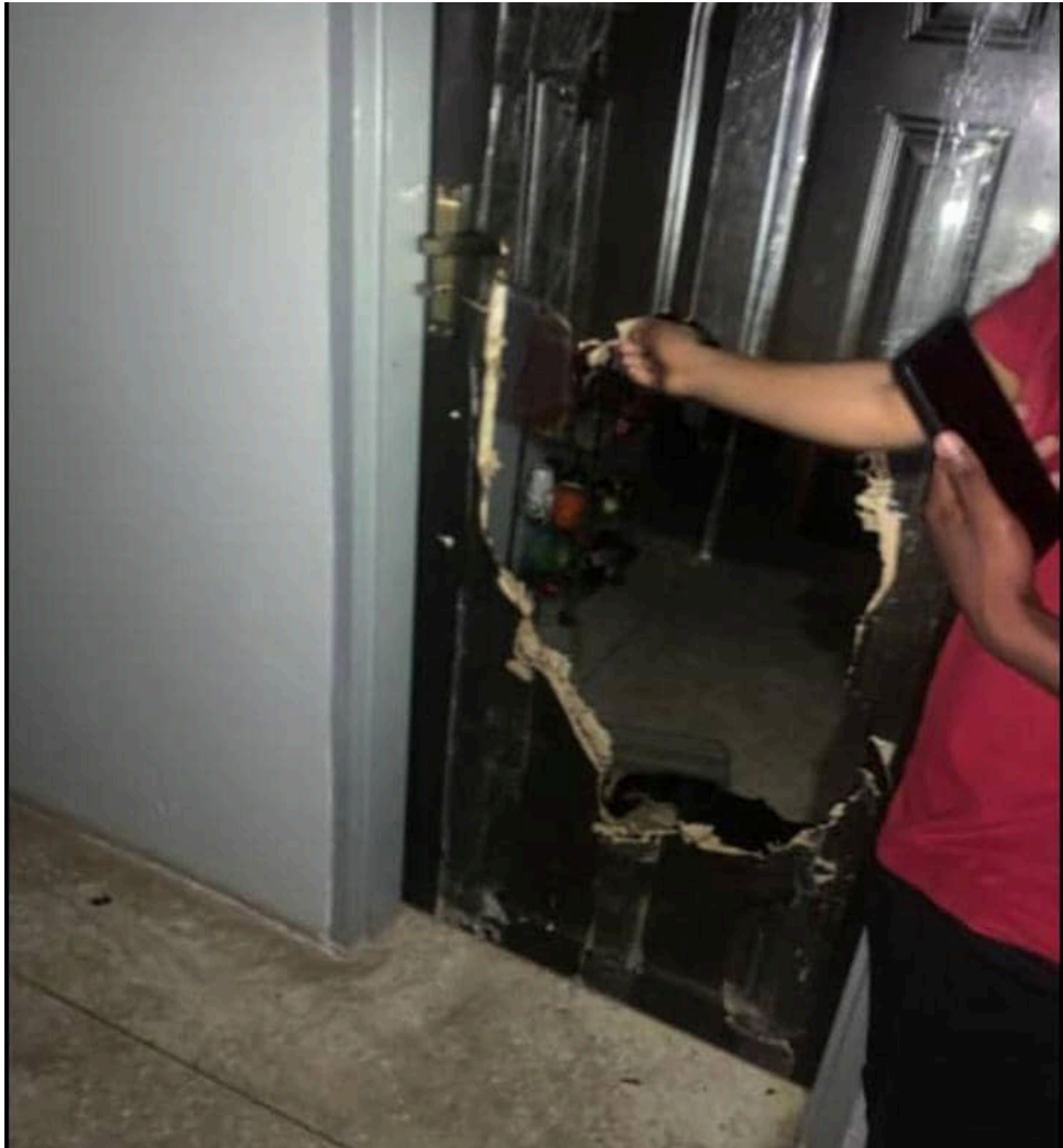
Police officials attributed the spike in reported crimes largely to poverty, substance abuse, and reduced community vigilance.

“Assault cases increase exponentially towards month-end when people are paid and tend to drink beer more, leading to conflicts,” Godfrey Chilabi told MakanDay.

and institutional partnerships, including with Levy Mwanawansa Medical University, measures residents say are irregular and unpredictable.

“Sometimes you see police vehicles, sometimes you don’t. At night, you are mostly on your own,” said a Mtendere shop owner.

Police themselves acknowledge that patrols are often reactive rather than preventive.



Students and boarding-house residents were singled out as frequent targets, with officers warning that “junkies” often monitor hostels and rental properties for theft opportunities.

To counter these trends, police say they are intensifying patrols, particularly in crime-prone areas such as Kalikiliki and Kalingalinga, and strengthening community engagement through the Community Service Delivery framework and the Victim Support Unit.

Promises versus presence on the ground

Police said they are responding through increased patrols in high-density areas, community sensitisation on crime prevention, coordination with neighbourhood watch groups, student security-orientation programmes,

“We do not have specific times to carry out patrols. We target areas where junkies hide,” Chilabi said, urging communities to be vigilant and report suspicious activities.

The manpower crisis behind the crime

At the heart of the problem is a chronic shortage of police officers.

Zambia currently has a police-to-citizen ratio ranging between 1:700 and 1:894, far below the United Nations-recommended standard of 1:450.

According to government figures, Zambia’s roughly 22,000 police officers are responsible for a population of nearly 20 million people.

Rising Crime, Thin Policing Cont...

This gap is not without consequences. In high-density townships like Mtendere and Kalingalinga, one officer may be responsible for thousands of residents, making thorough investigations, follow-ups, and community patrols practically impossible.

Even the Inspector General of Police, Graphel Musamba, has publicly acknowledged the strain, recently appealing for the recruitment of 3,000 new officers ahead of the 2026 general elections.

Government acknowledgment, slow solutions

Government officials have repeatedly conceded that policing capacity has not kept pace with population growth.

The demand for policing services continues to rise due to increased population, urbanisation, and economic activity. In a ministerial statement to Parliament in November 2023, Home Affairs and Internal Security Minister Jack Mwiimbu confirmed that Zambia’s police-to-citizen ratio had worsened to one officer for every 894 citizens.

What remains unclear is when, or how, this gap will be closed, particularly in urban settlements where crime rates remain high and police posts are already overstretched.

Brenda Muzeya is an intern at MakanDay under the Free Press Initiative’s Journalism Graduate Internship Programme, which aims to promote excellence in journalism.



A US\$50 million Clean-Up That Stayed on Paper: Kabwe’s Lead Crisis

Despite a World Bank-backed remediation project and years of international scrutiny, Kabwe’s residents say contamination, illness, and broken promises still define daily life.

By Luckson Mwale

In Makululu township, 14-year-old Oliver struggles in school. Once energetic and curious, he now battles learning difficulties and stigma. Some teachers label him “slow”. Doctors later confirmed that his blood-lead levels were dangerously high.

Beyond illness, families describe anxiety, guilt, and economic strain. Hospital visits consume scarce income. Some children are pulled out of school. These costs never appear in financial statements, yet they remain the most enduring legacy of Kabwe’s pollution.

Kabwe’s lead poisoning crisis has been documented for decades, yet accountability remains elusive.

Media reports dating back more than 40 years trace the contamination to the Kabwe mine, formerly Broken Hill, where Anglo American invested in lead mining operations in 1925 and is alleged to have exercised significant control and management until Zambia nationalised the mining sector in 1974.

The mine continued operating under state ownership before eventually closing in 1994, leaving behind widespread and enduring lead contamination that continues to affect thousands of residents.



Despite the scale of exposure, with tens of thousands of children and women of childbearing age reportedly poisoned by residual lead dust, comprehensive remediation came only decades later.

It was only after sustained public pressure and growing international scrutiny that the Zambian government, with World Bank support, launched the Zambia Mining and Environmental Remediation and Improvement Project (ZMERIP). The delay has raised persistent questions about responsibility for one of the world’s longest-running industrial poisoning cases—and why justice and redress have taken so long.

ZMERIP began in 2016 and was scheduled to end on June 28, 2024.

This investigation finds a persistent gap between funding and impact: while millions were disbursed for remediation, audits flagged waste and stalled contracts, procurement records show spending on vehicles and consultancy services, and residents say contamination and illness remain largely unchanged.

Ministry of Mines records show that the project had a core budget of US\$50 million, aligned with the World Bank’s broader commitment. It was designed to reduce environmental and public health risks associated with mining pollution in Kabwe and parts of the Copperbelt by

rehabilitating contaminated sites and strengthening regulatory oversight.

The project was structured around four main components, US\$25 million was allocated to site remediation and environmental governance, US\$10 million to institutional strengthening for agencies such as the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) and the Mines Safety Department, US\$12 million to local environmental improvements, including works on the Kabwe canal and soil containment, and US\$3 million to project management and monitoring.

In addition, US\$1.2 million was spent during the preparatory phase in 2015 on consultancy services, baseline studies, and engineering designs.

According to the World Bank reports, the first component, remediation of contaminated hotspots and improvement of environmental infrastructure, financed targeted clean-up activities and related environmental infrastructure in Kabwe and parts of the Copperbelt.

But residents say that, on the ground, the promised support has yet to materialise. They report receiving little or no tangible assistance from government,

A US\$50 million Clean-Up That Stayed on Paper: Kabwe’s Lead Crisis Cont....

while roads in affected communities remain in poor condition, worsening access and compounding the health challenges of those living near the mine.

“They told us the clean-up had started,” said Margaret Mwelwa, a resident of Makululu Township. “But the dust is still here, the children are still sick, and nothing has changed.”

The 2021 Auditor General’s Report raised serious concerns over the project’s implementation. It cited wasteful expenditure of more than US\$1 million after over 20,200 doses of anti-lead poisoning drugs expired, attributing the losses to weak testing systems and poor follow-up of affected children. Health workers told auditors that many children who tested positive were never monitored again, even after elevated lead levels were detected.

The audit also flagged failures to recover advance payments for stalled contracts. These included a borehole project at hotspot schools in Kabwe that never commenced because required environmental management plans were not finalised. By mid-2022, substantial sums remained unrecovered.

Several critical engineering interventions also failed to progress. The Kabwe canal, identified as a major route for contaminated storm water through densely populated neighbourhoods, remains largely unimproved. Planned rehabilitation of tailings and overburden dumps on the Copperbelt advanced little beyond the design stage, despite funds being allocated.

Meanwhile, this investigation found that the government sank 12 boreholes under the project. Records further show that more than US\$292,000 was spent on vehicles, including contracts for drones and drone pilot services, financed through the World Bank project.

Procurement data further indicate that in September 2020 alone, a contract worth US\$44,000 was awarded for the procurement of a “motor vehicle for Kabwe,” according to information published on the World Bank’s website.

The result, residents say, was a project that exists more convincingly on paper than on the ground. As a result,

children diagnosed with elevated lead levels were neither followed up nor treated consistently, undermining the project’s central public health objective

Elizabeth Njovu, Project Manager at Environment Africa, says the failures point to a deeper accountability crisis.

“Kabwe’s poison is not history,” she says. “It is the cost of forgotten accountability.”

In October 2020, nearly 140,000 Kabwe residents, represented by the law firms Leigh Day and Mbuyisa Moleele, filed a class-action lawsuit in South Africa against Anglo American, which operated the Kabwe mine before Zambia’s independence.

The case sought compensation for widespread lead poisoning linked to the mine.

In July 2023, the Gauteng Division of the High Court allowed the case to proceed to a certification hearing. United Nations experts and Amnesty International intervened in 2022 and were admitted as amici curiae, supporting the victims’ claims.

However, on December 15, 2023, the court refused to certify the proposed class action. In a 126-page judgment, Justice Leonie Windell ruled that holding a company liable decades after it ceased operations would set a “grave precedent,” particularly for harm assessed against standards that did not exist at the time.

At the same time, the court acknowledged that a class action remains the only realistic avenue through which Kabwe’s victims could access justice, underscoring the continuing legal impasse facing affected communities.

Anglo American has consistently denied responsibility. In a 2024 email to Colonist Report, the company said it “will fervently defend itself since we are not responsible for the situation in Kabwe – as the High Court in South Africa recently affirmed back in December 2023”.

Joackim Bunda, a father of three from Chowa township and one of the plaintiffs, says the wait has been agonising.

“We heard compensation would come,” he says. “But years have passed. Our children are still sick.”

No compensation has yet reached some affected families.

Kabwe’s experience exposes the limits of funding without accountability. Without transparency, enforcement, and sustained oversight, even the largest remediation budgets risk becoming another layer of dust over an unresolved crisis.

Implementation responsibility was split among government ministries and regulatory agencies, while the World Bank provided financing and oversight. This diffusion of responsibility, experts say, has made it difficult to enforce accountability when projects stall.

A set of questions were sent to the World Bank seeking comment on the project, including whether Anglo American was involved in supporting the loan provided to Zambia. By the time of publication, the World Bank had not responded.

Requests for comment were also sent to the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment, which sits on the committee overseeing the Kabwe Mine remediation initiative. By the time of publication, the Ministry had not responded.

The questions sought to establish what steps the ministry is taking to ensure Kabwe becomes lead-free, and to assess the impact of World Bank funds on affected communities.

Luckson Mwale is a fellow under the Wildlife Crime Prevention (WCP) environmental fellowship for journalists. The MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism, in partnership with WCP, supported the reporting of this story.



Photos by Tommy Trenchard - npr website

When Africa Is Pulled Into War by Deception

As more vivid and disturbing accounts from the Russia–Ukraine war come to light, they increasingly confirm what MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism has been warning about for over a year: Africa is not merely observing this conflict from afar, Africans are being pulled into it, often through deception, coercion, and silence.

A recent CNN investigation laid bare one of the most chilling examples yet. The report shows an African recruit in the Russian army, a Kenyan man, with a landmine strapped to his chest, being ordered to charge Ukrainian positions on the front line.

CNN spoke to more than a dozen African men from Ghana, Uganda, and Nigeria who say they were coerced into joining the Russian army and deployed to active combat with little to no training.

These revelations are horrifying. But they are not isolated.

When MakanDay first encountered early reports of African recruitment linked to Russia in 2024, we noted a dangerous contradiction: on one hand, aggressive recruitment messaging and glossy promotional material circulating in Zambia and elsewhere on the continent; on the other, alarming international reports suggesting exploitation, secrecy, and militarisation.

That contradiction prompted our first investigation, published in December 2024, into the Russian “Alabuga Start” programme, marketed as a work-study or skills-development opportunity, but specifically targeting young African women and girls.

The programme promises free flights, long-term accommodation, work training, and salaries far above average earnings in their home countries. It is presented as a gateway to opportunity and integration into Russian society.

Yet behind the marketing lies a troubling lack of transparency.

Although Zambia’s Immigration Department has not publicly confirmed how many young women have travelled under

the programme, MakanDay’s investigations found that at least four Zambian women had recently joined.

Further reporting uncovered the involvement of organisations such as the Zambia-Russia Graduates Alumni Association (ZAMRUS) and the Smile Nation Foundation in The Gambia in promoting the initiative.

Despite being advertised as “an international programme from Russia offering a free flight and a chance to earn well, even without work experience,” the true nature of Alabuga Start remains opaque.

Concerned by the cross-border dimensions of the recruitment drive, MakanDay escalated the investigation through the Network of African Investigative Reporters and Editors (NAIRE). What followed was a seven-country collaborative investigation examining how and why so many young Africans accept these offers, sometimes even after warnings have been raised.

For the Zambian chapter, MakanDay succeeded in interviewing one of the recruited young women in Russia. Her testimony sharply contradicted the cheerful public-relations imagery circulated in Zambia, of smiling girls in uniform, glowing testimonials, and polished media appearances on social media.

According to her account, once inside Alabuga, recruits have limited freedom to communicate with their families and almost no ability to speak publicly.

Contacting her took MakanDay more than seven months. When she finally agreed to speak, she described confusion, isolation, and uncertainty about the work taking place inside the compound.

Even after nearly a year, she said she still does not fully understand what the Alabuga programme is or what its industrial activities truly entail.

She described observing operations related to automotive manufacturing, construction, and what she referred to as “advanced materials,” but could not explain their purpose.

“I can’t understand this company and why so many people from around the world are here,” she said.

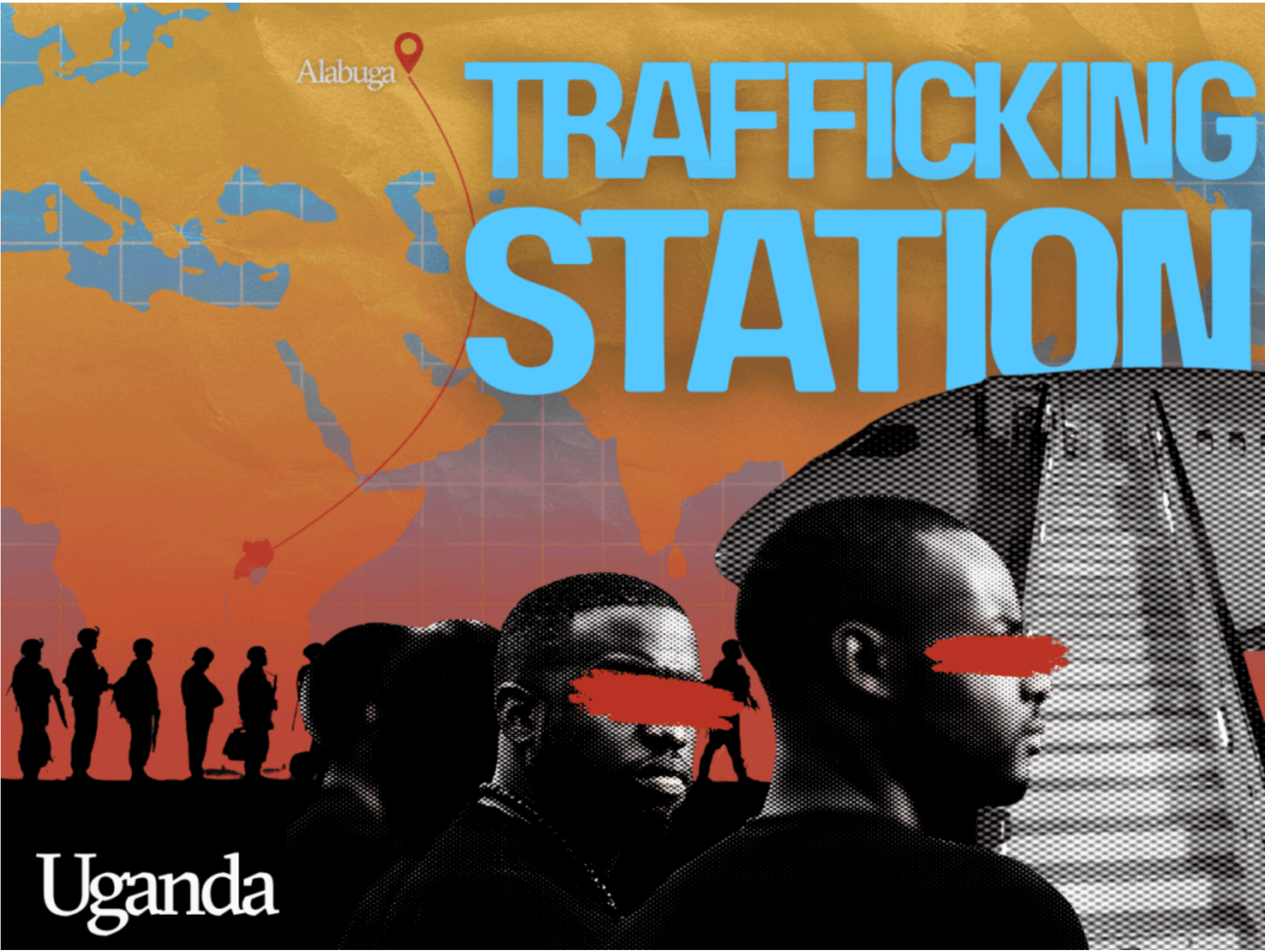
The contrast between lived reality and public messaging could not be starker.

What is perhaps most alarming, however, is the silence. Governments across the region, including Zambia’s, have said little. Public debate remains muted. Official scrutiny is limited. Meanwhile, young Africans continue to be drawn into opaque systems linked to a foreign war whose risks they do not fully grasp.

MakanDay believes this silence is dangerous.

These are not isolated labour issues. They are matters of human rights, national responsibility, and continental dignity. When African lives are treated as expendable labour or disposable combatants in a foreign conflict, governments have a duty to ask hard questions, and to act.

The stories emerging now should not be met with shock alone. They should provoke accountability. Where are the church leaders? Why are our governments quiet?



This week in the Bulletin & Record Magazine

The Woman Who Broke The Ceiling

Kingsley Kaswende talks to Joyce Nonde-Simukoko about her ground-breaking career in trade unionism

There are trailblazers, and then there are those who make history. Joyce Nonde-Simukoko does both.

In the taxing, male-dominated field of trade unionism in Zambia - one that is as heady as politics – Mrs Nonde-Simukoko is the first woman to reach the top echelons of the system.

She became the first female general secretary of a trade union at national level, and president of a trade union confederation. The union she headed was the Zambia Union of Financial and Allied Workers (ZUFIAW) and the confederation was the Federation of Free Trade Unions of Zambia (FFTUZ), rival to the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). That was in 1996 and 2002, respectively.

From then on, Mrs Nonde-Simukoko has been known as the woman who broke the glass ceiling in trade unionism in Zambia, and it is fair to say that she changed the course of trade unionism in the country.

By the time she retires in April this year (2013), Mrs Nonde-Simukoko, who is well-known for talking tough and playing hardball with government, will have clocked up 30 years in the industry. However, these days she is more interested in, as she says, changing women from the inside out so they can go and change their society.

Her career in unionism, she says, has been a roller-coaster ride, stressing that the jarring trip has been purely as a result of her gender rather than her ability to deliver results.

The Woman Who Broke The Ceiling Cont...

“Men hate having a woman direct them...Generally, women are better managers than men,” she says.

She joined the trade union movement as a “naïve” 25-year-old in 1983 while working in the accounts department at the Zambia National Building Society, a parastatal housing finance institution.

“It has been a long, painful journey. It has not been easy,” she says, directing my attention to a section of a filing cabinet packed with court documents. “It has been a hell of a time.”

In fact, it was so much of a hellish period that she did not even find time for marriage earlier in life. It was only four years ago that she finally walked down the aisle - as a 50-year-old bride. “I was married to my work. My husband was the union,” chuckles Mrs Nonde-Simukoko, who in October 2008 married Lusaka commercial lawyer Geoffrey Simukoko in what was described as the “wedding of the year”.

Such has been her machismo in trade unionism. She battled against the grain of the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) government over and over again.

“I had a difficult time under the MMD and it’s a party I’ll never miss,” she says. “I am one of those who fought for the MMD to come to power. Little did I know that those we fought for didn’t believe in democracy. The MMD had a chance to change things but they perpetrated one-party state ideals, which is why it is difficult for the opposition now.”

She continues: “Our members are part of society and we talk on their behalf. When you criticise the government some people feel you are trying to bring it down. Unfortunately, I was also betrayed by members of my national executive committee who were bought by the MMD, who [gave the] impression that our union’s viewpoints were my personal viewpoints.”

She says that some executive members of the union were continually battling to have her removed.

“I’ve got dossiers on all the people I have differed with. It’s about money. I blocked the abuse of funds. I’m very strict when it comes to money and they don’t like it. I’ve told them I’ll not allow the misuse of funds as long as I’m general secretary,” she said

The MMD government fired a volley of cases against her. She was dragged to court over her eligibility to

be general secretary of ZUFIAW. As it happened, the court case coincided with her union’s 2006 quadrennial conference, and at the conference the government had anointed a leader to challenge her candidature.

“But because of the huge support I had that person withdrew and I was unopposed,” she says, refusing to disclose the name of that person.

The Labour Commissioner at the time, Noah Siasimuna, refused to endorse her name because her case was in court, which angered ZUFIAW members, who wondered why her nomination had been successful. The conference resolved to keep the executive members in office until the courts resolved the matter.

“This is why we [ZUFIAW] haven’t gone to the conference up to now. The government then wrote to us that we’ve been dissolved and we went to court to block government’s move. The court granted us an injunction restraining the government from interfering with our affairs. So, we were surviving on account of a court order,” she says.

The court ruled in her favour in 2007, but government appealed to the Supreme Court over that ruling. That was five years ago and the Supreme Court has yet to make a ruling.

There was more to come. In 2008, government decided to amend the law to challenge her eligibility to be president of FFTUZ on the grounds that she had resigned her job at Zambia National Building Society to be employed full time by ZUFIAW. The proposed amendments to the Industrial and Labour Relations Act would have disqualified her because union officials would have had to be employed by a financial institution, and Mrs Nonde-Simukoko had earlier resigned her job at the Zambia National Building Society.

“The 2008 changes to the Industrial and Labour Relations Act ended up hurting those who sponsored them within our union because I was still serving (as general secretary) under the court order,” she says, with a touch of triumph.

“The 2008 Act gives government and employers absolute power over unions. Employers can choose to ignore us and government has the right to dissolve us at any time. We [unions] are surviving at the mercy of government and employers.”

However, Mrs Nonde-Simukoko seems to be in the good books of President Michael Sata’s Patriotic



Photo Credit: Lusaka Times

Front government, which has made a commitment to withdraw the appeal from the Supreme Court and to kill the “malicious” 2008 changes to the Industrial and Labour Relations Act.

Mrs Nonde-Simukoko was instrumental in forming the FFTUZ, which now rivals ZCTU. The break-away happened in 1992, soon after the MMD came into power.

“We had differences after the 1991 elections. As ZUFIAW, we felt the need to restructure the trade union movement after a transition from a one-party state into a democratic state. We had supported the MMD and we needed to assert ourselves whether we would continue supporting the party in government or we would go back to the trenches,” she explains.

“We came up with a proposal which we presented at the ZCTU Congress. At that time, ZUFIAW had lost about 500 members who had been fired during the strikes and we understood that ZCTU leaders had not represented us fairly. In fact they were behind the firing of some of our members who had wanted to challenge them at the congress.”

The reform proposal was rejected and 11 unions thought they must leave ZCTU and form a parallel union centre. However, it took five years for FFTUZ to be registered and all but two unions (ZUFIAW and MUZ, the Mine Workers Union of Zambia) returned to ZCTU.

Soon after, MUZ also went back to ZCTU, leaving ZUFIAW on its own. This had legal consequences, as a minimum of two unions were legally required to form a union centre.

“Government wanted to deregister us but they had no legal basis to deregister us,” she says. “So all they could do was ignore us. We were never invited to the tripartite consultative meetings. We went to court to seek an order to be

admitted to the consultative meetings and it was granted.” FFTUZ now has 20 member unions.

For now, Mrs Nonde-Simukoko does not envisage FFTUZ uniting with ZCTU. “Our interest is to work together, but the ZCTU didn’t want to work with us over the years. As at now, there’s no unity. How can you re-unite with people who betrayed you?” she says.

As she leaves trade union work, her wish is to see sweeping reforms in the trade union movement. “I’m seeing a lot of confusion in trade unionism in Zambia. Most union leaders are compromised. Being partisan has its own consequences,” she says, using generalities.

She says unions are failing to adequately represent their workers because most union leaders are politically compromised.

“Look at what happened in South Africa,” she says, referring to the incident at South Africa’s Marikana mine in which 34 miners were shot dead by police during a prolonged strike. “The unions were polarised by politics. Government and unions have conflicting interests and there’s no way they can work together.”

She also wants reforms that will allow managers to belong to trade unions, as opposed to the current set-up where they are barred from union activities. “In this capitalist economy, employers don’t want union representatives who are in management. They want those who are less educated, whom they can manipulate. Their interest is to make profits, but we now realise that we need effective and educated union leaders who can match their opponents,” she says.

Asked why she was leaving the world of unions, she says she has simply decided to “hand over and let others take over”.

She is also approaching the age of 55, the ceiling allowed by the ZUFIAW constitution for office bearers.

Could the PF be courting her? Her response does not completely dismiss this suggestion.

“I won’t say ‘no’ categorically,” she says, when asked if she was contemplating joining politics. “I don’t know where my future will take me. I’ve learnt in life not to say ‘I can’t’. People thought I was criticising government because I wanted to be in politics.

I would have joined politics as early as the 1990s when [former president Frederick Chiluba] invited me twice, but I refused and said I was young and I needed to focus on my career.”

For now, she says she is a happy wife. “I’m enjoying my marriage. It’s another side of life. I enjoyed my single life and I enjoyed my freedom, which I used very well. I feel I’m a very lucky person,” she says.

She does not have children of her own but she is raising children of her deceased sisters. One of those children was recently married off.

“I never made a conscious decision to be single or not to have children in my early life. It just happened. My kind of work did not just give a chance to this,” she says, a common dilemma for career women, who often have a tough time deciding whether to continue on their career trajectory or to stop and risk their career to have children.

Mrs Nonde-Simukoko now gets invited mostly by churches to give motivational talks to young girls on how to she managed to be single up to the age of 50.

She advises them how to deal with single life and not to rush into marriage.

“I tell them that it’s not a crime to be single,” she says.

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