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K250 Million Promised, Zero Centres

Inside Zambia's rehab gap as drug crisis hits the poor hardest

- Zambia has budgeted billions for health — but not a single line for rehabilitation. And in that silence, the country's addiction crisis continues to grow.



By Sandra Kunda | *MakanDay Investigates*

In August 2025, the Zambian government announced a K250 million national drug rehabilitation and skills development centre, promising a decisive response to a growing addiction crisis.

Eight months later, there is no construction, no dedicated budget line, and no public rehabilitation centre, leaving thousands of struggling families with nowhere to turn.

A *MakanDay* investigation has found a widening gap between policy promises and reality, with the burden falling hardest on poor communities.

A promise on paper

The announcement, made by Vice President Mutale Nalumango at a stakeholders' meeting co-hosted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC), positioned the rehabilitation centre as a major intervention to address rising drug abuse.

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However, a review of the 2026 national budget reveals no clear allocation of K250 million for the project. Instead, the budget shows that K600,000 has been allocated to psychotropic substance use rehabilitation, while K1,489,900 — just under K1.5 million — is earmarked for provincial drug rehabilitation and prevention programmes under the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security.

That figure must stretch across all ten provinces — covering prevention, treatment, and recovery support for a growing number of young people battling addiction.

Broken down, it amounts to roughly K149,000 per province per year — a figure that raises serious questions about whether meaningful rehabilitation services can exist at all under such constraints.

Yet the contradiction runs deeper. While the Ministry of Health has been allocated over K26.1 billion for drugs, infrastructure and hospital operations, there is no specific allocation for drug rehabilitation centres or addiction treatment facilities.

The absence of a dedicated budget line for the promised K250 million rehabilitation centre raises a broader question: is addiction being treated as a public health crisis — or primarily as a law enforcement issue?

On the ground: An empty site

DEC spokesperson Allan Tamba confirmed that a site for the rehabilitation centre has been identified in Balmoral, Chilanga district, but noted that government is still “mobilising resources” from both public and private partners.

Those who have visited the site say there are no signs of construction. The land remained bare, overgrown with grass and trees, with no visible activity to suggest that work had begun. The centre that was meant to signal action remains, for now, an unfulfilled plan.

No public rehab, no alternative

DEC continues to focus on counselling, prevention campaigns, and law enforcement. However, mental health experts warn that this approach is incomplete and fails to address the needs of those already addicted.

“We cannot solve addiction with awareness alone. Those who are already addicted need structured treatment and recovery spaces,” said Kapambwe Chikontwe, a clinical neuropsychologist at Serenity Wellness Centre in Roma Township, Lusaka.

Serenity Wellness Centre, established by the Capuchin Franciscan Order in Zambia, provides mental health and rehabilitation services in response to growing mental health challenges and a sharp rise in alcohol and drug use.

The centre attends to more than 100 patients each year. In 2025 alone, it handled at least 137 clients — 109 males and 27 females. According to the centre, substance addiction is often linked to trauma, grief and loss, stress, depression, and other mental health conditions such as bipolar and psychotic disorders. Peer pressure, the increasing availability of drugs, and possible genetic vulnerability are also contributing factors.

The cost of recovery — and who is left out

With no public option available, families are forced to turn to private rehabilitation centres, where the cost of treatment remains prohibitively high.

Investigations into private facilities show that residential rehabilitation ranges between K8,000 and K12,000 per month. Initial assessments cost between K500 and K1,000 per hour, while therapy sessions range from K600 to K2,000 per hour. The minimum treatment period is typically two months or more.

For many families, these costs are simply out of reach. In Kitwe’s Ndeke Township, Stan Kambele, a small-scale farmer, says his 22-year-old son is battling addiction, and there are no public rehabilitation centres in Kitwe, according to experts in the field.

“When they told us it costs K8,000 per month, we knew it was not possible. My income does not even reach K7,000. Now we just wait, hoping he comes home alive,” he said.

Managing addiction at home — at a cost

In Lusaka, the Banda family attempted to manage addiction without professional support. After developing a cocaine dependency, Alfred Banda was taken to a rural area to isolate him from drugs, but the withdrawal nearly cost him his life.

“For two weeks he could not sleep. We didn’t know what to do. We are not medical personnel. He almost died,” said his sister, Hildah Banda.

A system tilted toward arrests

Government response to drug abuse remains heavily enforcement-driven. Records from the Drug Enforcement Commission indicate that in 2025, a total of 4,750 individuals were arrested in connection with drug-related offences, with 3,789 convictions recorded. In contrast, only 898 individuals received professional counselling services for drug dependence, and there is no record of any residential rehabilitation being conducted.

For many families, this has created a cycle in which individuals are arrested, released, and then relapse due to lack of treatment.

“My brother was arrested several times. Each time he came back worse,” said Hildah Banda.

New drugs, growing risk

As treatment options remain limited, the drug landscape continues to evolve. DEC has confirmed the presence of several illicit substances in circulation, including methamphetamine (commonly known as crystal meth), codeine, khat (mira), heroin, and a locally produced mixture known as “volo,” which combines cannabis and heroin.

In some communities, users are engaging in a dangerous practice referred to as “bluetooth,” where blood is shared through injection from one user to another. This practice poses significant health risks.

Drugs are now accessible at very low prices, with some users reporting that substances can be purchased for as little as K30. This affordability has made drugs increasingly accessible to unemployed youth and school-going children.

A public health crisis — without a public response

Public health experts argue that addiction should be treated as a national public health emergency rather than solely as a criminal issue. A Health Official at the Zambia National Public Health Institute, warns that heavy reliance on partnerships to fund the rehabilitation centre could delay its implementation.

Without direct and sustained government investment, the promised rehabilitation facility may remain stalled, even as the crisis deepens.

The real cost of delay

Behind the statistics are families facing daily uncertainty and loss. A father waits for his son to return home. A family nearly loses a loved one during withdrawal. Others endure repeated cycles of arrest and relapse.

The K250 million rehabilitation centre was meant to mark a turning point. Instead, it has come to symbolise a deeper systemic gap—one where policy commitments are not matched by funding or implementation.

A crisis without a centre

Back in Kitwe, Kambele says his son still needs help, but the systems meant to provide that help remain out of reach.

“As a struggling family, we cannot do this by ourselves,” he said.



Forensic Results Emerge in Kasama Deaths, But Key Gaps Remain

This case was first exposed by MakanDay in an earlier investigation, which uncovered conflicting accounts and serious gaps in how key forensic evidence was handled — questions that remain unresolved months later.

From page 1

By Charles Mafa

For more than three months, the family of two brothers — 27-year-old Harrington and his younger brother, 21-year-old Joshua Mbeleko — waited for answers. The two died just hours apart inside a house in Kasama. Since then, their family has been left with questions the police have failed to answer.

But during a MakanDay-organised public discussion in Lusaka on April 24, a new development emerged. Police told the audience that toxicology test results are now available — results that could finally shed light on what caused the brothers' deaths.

In such cases, toxicology tests involve analysing samples such as blood, urine, or organs like the liver and stomach to detect any substances that may explain what happened.

Until then, no post-mortem results had been shared with the family. Police accounts of what happened to key forensic evidence have shifted over time, with no clear explanation. Meanwhile, the officer who first responded to the scene was transferred to another district — a move the police described as administrative routine. For the family, however, it has only deepened their frustration.

Harrington and Joshua had travelled from Lusaka to Kasama after Harrington secured work with a businessman at a vehicle fitment company. Months later, both were found critically ill in the room where they were staying. One died at the scene. The other died shortly after being rushed to hospital.

Police spokesperson Godfrey Chilabi said in Zambia, cases of unusual death require the involvement of other institutions to conduct scientific examinations and establish the cause. Currently, in Zambia, these tests are done from the National Food

and Drug Commission at the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka.

“In this case, and for this matter, that’s what happened. We resorted now, to toxicological examination. Samples were taken, the liver, the kidneys and something was taken from the stomach,” said Chilabi. “So now these were taken so that the scientists can do further, in terms of the findings.”

“I can confirm before coming here, that the samples and everything were done,” he added.

During the discussion, Chilabi briefly showed the test result form on his phone to Mweelwa Muleya, Director of Education, Training and Advocacy at the Human Rights Commission, who was part of the panel.

Muleya stressed the need for law enforcement agencies to establish their own forensic facilities to speed up investigations — a reform the Commission has long advocated. He added that the Commission remains obligated to intervene whenever there are concerns about maladministration of justice.

Commissioner Joseph Chishala of the Police Public Complaints Commission echoed concerns about accountability, noting that the commission’s role is limited to making recommendations and advising both the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security and the police.

For the family, however, the issue remains communication. Moses Soko, the late brothers’ uncle, said the family had not been informed of any progress in the investigation.

“There has been no communication from the police. As a family, we did not know what stage the investigations had reached,” he said.

Chilabi apologised for the lapse in communication and invited the family to Police Headquarters for a formal update.

Key questions remain unanswered — including when the samples were transported from Kasama to Lusaka. Three weeks after the deaths, when MakanDay contacted UTH, officials indicated that the samples had not yet been received.

The discussion, attended by students from the University of Zambia and Cavendish University, raised broader concerns about forensic capacity, transparency, and the treatment of families in cases of unexplained deaths.

The event is part of MakanDay’s mission to investigate, publish, and use evidence to drive informed public discussion.



OPINION | When Answers Exist But Justice Doesn't

In Kasama, two young men died within hours of each other. Three months later, their family is still waiting, not just for answers, but for a system that treats their loss with urgency, transparency, and dignity.

The deaths of Harrington (27) and Joshua Mbeleko (21) were never just a tragedy. They were a test of Zambia’s investigative systems — and so far, that system is failing.

MakanDay’s first investigation, “[The Unexplained Deaths — What happened in that room?](#)”, exposed troubling gaps: conflicting accounts from authorities, unclear handling of forensic evidence, and a silence that left the family in the dark.

Now, months later, police say toxicology results are available. But instead of clarity, the development raises a more uncomfortable truth: in Zambia, answers can exist, and still not reach the people who need them most.

This is not just about one family. It is about how justice works, or doesn’t.

At the centre of the problem is a weak forensic system. As confirmed during the MakanDay public discussion,

Zambia relies on limited facilities, with critical tests conducted at the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka.

That means delays. It means bottlenecks. And in cases like this, it means uncertainty. But infrastructure alone is not the full story.

Even where processes exist, communication is failing. The Mbeleko family says they were never informed of progress. They did not know when samples were taken, where they were sent, or what the results revealed. Instead, the information surfaced in a public forum, not through formal channels, but on a phone screen.

That is not how justice is supposed to work.

Justice is not only about finding answers. It is about who receives them, when, and how. A system that produces results but fails to communicate them is not functioning, it is withholding.

There is also a deeper accountability gap. The Police Public Complaints Commission, by its own admission, can only recommend and advise. It cannot enforce. That leaves families caught between institutions that investigate, institutions that analyse,

Opinion | Are Zambia’s Leaders Ready to Fix the Youth Jobs Crisis?

and institutions that oversee — but none that are ultimately accountable.

The result is a cycle of delay, deflection, and frustration.

Meanwhile, key questions remain unresolved. When were the samples transported? Why were they reportedly not received weeks after the deaths? Why did official accounts change? And why was the family left out of the process entirely?

On paper, that is progress. It signals intent and reflects an understanding that skills are central to economic participation.

These are not technical questions. They are fundamental. Because when a system cannot clearly account for evidence, it cannot convincingly deliver justice.

Zambia’s broader criminal justice system is being quietly tested in cases like this, not in high-

profile courtrooms, but in ordinary rooms where ordinary people die under unclear circumstances.

And what these cases reveal is a system that reacts slowly, communicates poorly, and struggles to close the loop between investigation and accountability.

For the Mbeleko family, this is deeply personal. But for the country, it is systemic.

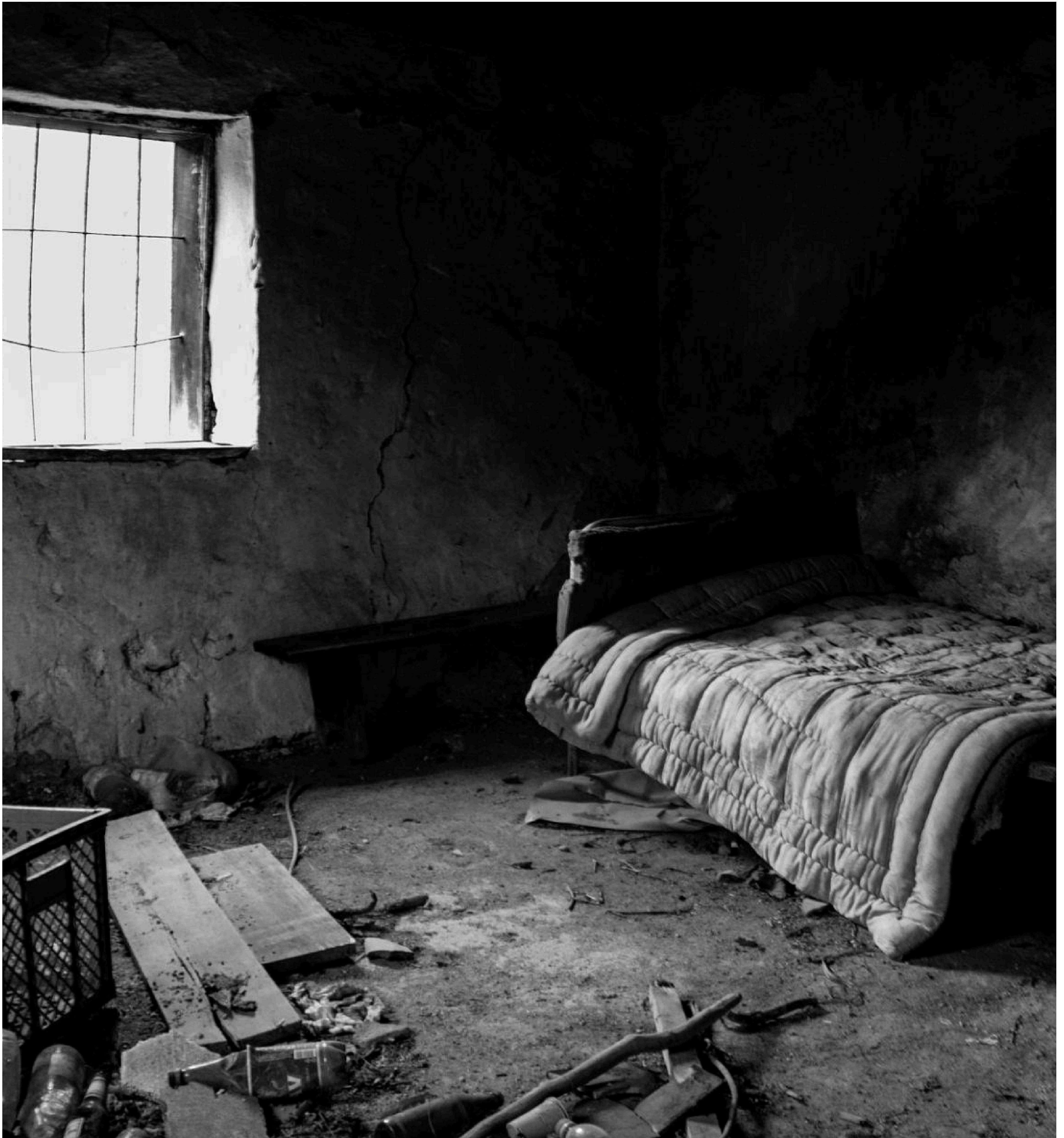
Until forensic capacity is strengthened, communication is

institutionalised, and accountability mechanisms are given real power, cases like this will continue to drift — suspended between answers and uncertainty.

In Kasama, two young men are gone.

In Lusaka, the answers may already exist.

But until those answers are delivered with clarity and accountability, justice will remain incomplete, and out of reach.



This week in the Bulletin & Record

The man who challenged the one-party state

Mainza Chona played a key role in unifying the nationalist movement in the run up to Independence. Later, as chair of the 1972 Constitution Review Commission, he tried unsuccessfully to introduce democracy into Kenneth Kaunda's one-party state

By Walima T. Kalusa

When Mainza Mathias Chona died in a Johannesburg hospital, South Africa, on December 11 2001, Zambia was robbed of a shrewd, committed nationalist and politician, the likes of whom may not be seen on the Zambian political scene again for many years to come.

In his illustrious political career, Mr Chona exhibited unequalled selflessness through voluntarily handing over to Kenneth Kaunda the presidency of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) in 1960, even when the former was far more educated than Dr Kaunda. Later, in 1972, Mr Chona chaired a constitutional review commission which made a number of far-reaching liberal recommendations. The acceptance and implementation of these recommendations by the ruling elite would have saved the country from autocratic rule dominated by Dr Kaunda.

Initially named Joshua Namukamba, Mr Chona was born to Chief Haameja Chilobe Chilala and Chinyama Muuka in Zambia's Monze District, Southern Province, between 1929 and 1930. He received his primary education at the Seventh Day Adventist School at Mujika and later at Chikuni Mission School run by Catholic priests in Monze. While at Chikuni, Mr Chona converted to Catholicism, a faith he adhered to up until his death in 2001.

A brilliant pupil, our protagonist passed top of his Standard VI class and of the whole province in 1947. This earned him both a place in Form I and a government scholarship to study at Munali Secondary School, the only secondary school for Africans at that time. It was while at Munali that Mr Chona met and befriended Unia Mwila, Muyukanayumbwa Sipalo, Andrew Kashita, and Reuben Kamanga. These and several other men, like Mr Chona himself, would later play a leading role in the nationalist struggle for independence and in shaping the economic, cultural and political landscape of post-colonial Zambia.



Mainze Chona when he was Minister of Home Affairs

When Mr Chona left Munali, his dream was to study law and to become a lawyer. To this end, he studied at Gray's Inn school of law in England between 1955 and 1958. He earned a law degree and became a barrister in his final year, becoming Zambia's first qualified lawyer. As a student in the UK, Mr Chona, who at first seems to have been indifferent to anti-colonial politics, was increasingly drawn into politics of decolonisation thanks to the influence of Munalula Sikatana, a fellow student from Northern Rhodesia. Other people who influenced his political thought were Thomas Fox-Pitt, Simon Zukas and other progressive politicians opposed to British imperial rule in Africa and to the European settler-dominated Central African Federation (CAF) imposed on Africans in 1953. Mr Chona not only participated in several meetings of such anti-imperial movements as the Africa Bureau and the Movement for Colonial Freedom, he also joined other students who in 1958 signed and sent a letter to the British government to oppose CAF.

The involvement of the future vice-president of Zambia in decolonisation politics in the UK came to haunt him once he returned to Northern Rhodesia in the late 1950s. The colonial government denied him a job in the civil service. Nor were European-owned law firms willing to employ him because of the fear of losing white clients on account of his colour. Undaunted, the newly-qualified lawyer enlisted in the African National Congress (ANC) led by a fellow southerner, Harry Mwanga Nkumbula. But Mr Nkumbula's penchant for moderate politics coupled with his willingness to contest elections under the much-despised 1958 Benson constitution, which disenfranchised most Africans, vexed Mr Chona. Mr Chona thus lost faith in Mr Nkumbula's leadership.

After Paul Kalichini broke away from the ANC and formed the African National Party in 1959, Mr Chona, too, split away from Mr Nkumbula to create his own party. His party soon merged with Mr Kalichini's to create UNIP.

Mr Chona was elected president of the new party.

As UNIP president, his main goal was to unify the nationalist movement under the leadership of Dr Kaunda, who was still in prison following the proscription of Dr Kaunda's Zambia African National Congress (ZANC) towards the end of 1959. When Dr Kaunda was released in 1960, Mr Chona willingly stepped down to enable the former ZANC leader to assume the presidency of UNIP. Mr Chona's decision to hand over the topmost position in UNIP to the less educated Dr Kaunda demonstrated the Tonga politician's desire to unify the nationalist movement. He rightly believed that only a strong nationalist movement would dismantle British and settler hegemony in Northern Rhodesia.

In the aftermath of independence, Dr Kaunda returned Mr Chona's favour in several ways. Soon after independence in 1964, he appointed him Minister of Justice in the first cabinet. In subsequent years, the president encouraged or appointed the charismatic Tonga politician to occupy other key ranking positions in both UNIP and government: national secretary of UNIP (1960-1978), vice-president (1970-1973), chair of the Constitution Review Commission (1972), prime minister (1973-1975 and 1977-1978), UNIP secretary-general (1978-1981), ambassador to China (1981) and later ambassador to France. Mr Chona also served in numerous other capacities and perhaps occupied more ministerial portfolios in the Kaunda regime than any other leader.

Mr Chona is perhaps best remembered for his chairmanship of the 1972 Constitution Review Commission. It is now well known that the establishment of the commission was Dr Kaunda's response to the growing political wrangles and resulting factionalism within UNIP and, more importantly, to the threat posed to the party's grip on power by

The man who challenged the one-party state cont..

the creation of Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe's United Progressive Party in the early 1970s. It is no surprise, then, that the commission was not tasked with finding out whether people were in favour of establishing a one-party state, for this decision had already been made by Dr Kaunda when he constituted the commission. The main role of the commission was merely to draw up a constitution that would provide for the establishment of a one-party system of governance, thereby tightening Dr Kaunda's hold on power.

Many observers have questioned why Mr Chona agreed to chair the commission in view of its legal restrictions. To such observers, Mr Chona was merely a stooge of President Kaunda. This is not least because the commission endorsed Dr Kaunda's dream to create a one-party state modelled on that of the Soviet Union. What these detractors overlook, though, are the liberal recommendations of the commission, recommendations that were intended to enhance democracy even in the context of the one-party system.

Prominent among these recommendations were those that provided for electoral competition for the presidency and prevented the president from vetoing parliamentary candidates; restricted the president to serve only two five-year terms; placed a limitation on detention without trial; and provided for the office of prime minister, who would share executive powers with the president. Predictably, Dr Kaunda and UNIP rejected all these recommendations. There is no doubt, though, that in making the recommendations, the Mainza Chona Commission, as the 1972 Constitutional Review Commission is now famously known, sought to sow seeds of democracy by limiting the enormous powers of the presidency - a political malaise that still afflicts Zambia today.

The commission's recommendations, designed to reduce the authority of the president, may not to have strengthened the relationship between Dr Kaunda and Mr Chona. It is true that Dr Kaunda appointed Mr Chona prime minister soon after the

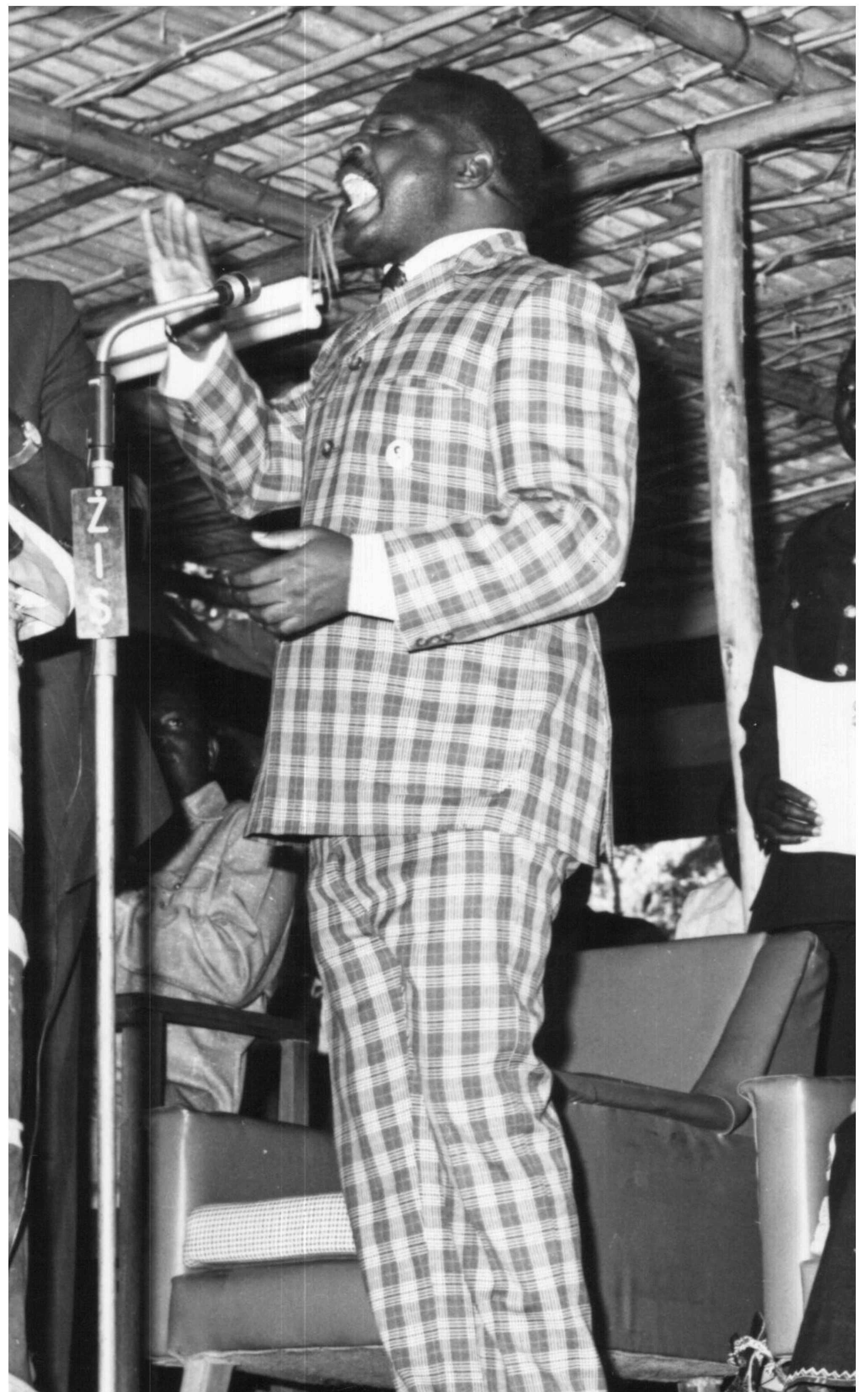
declaration of Zambia as a so-called one-party participatory democracy in 1973. But the office of prime minister was denied executive powers.

It is therefore not surprising that barely two years after his appointment the new prime minister resigned. However, President Kaunda persuaded him to take up the portfolio again in 1977 before elevating him to the position of UNIP secretary-general in 1978. Mr Chona occupied the latter position until 1981, when he was demoted and sent to China as Zambia's ambassador. That the relationship between two leaders thawed is reflected by Mr Chona's initial refusal to go to China. Although he eventually took up the appointment, Mr Chona described his stay in China as a period of "cold exile".

Mainza Mathias Chona was a unique leader. Despite occupying many high ranking positions in his long, illustrious political career, and despite being an outstanding lawyer, he, unlike most other African leaders, reportedly amassed no wealth. When he returned to the legal profession after leaving active politics in the 1980s, he sometimes willingly represented some clients who were too poor to pay him legal fees. Throughout his life, Mr Chona described himself a humble villager and he had an undying sense of humour. It was this humility that endeared him to many people, poor or rich.

But perhaps his greatest attribute was his tireless endeavour to unify the country. A true patriot, he abhorred regionalism and sectarianism even at the cost of provoking the wrath of some of his fellow southerners, who saw ethnicity as a ladder to climb to political power. For Zambia to remain united, politicians today need to emulate his selfless and dedicated leadership.

This story was first published in the April 2013 edition of the Bulletin and Record Magazine.



The secretary-general of the party Mainza Chona speaking at the official opening of the Luapula Province Political Conference held at Ntumba Chushi falls in Kawambwa, July 21, 1978



Mr and Mrs Chona seen cutting a cake at the Silver Jubilee anniversary. Looking on are President Kenneth Kaunda and the secretary-general of the party Grey Zulu outside the Roman Catholic Church, May 25, 1978

Answers Emerge, Questions Remain - MakanDay Public Discussion in Pictures

