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Former ZAMMSA Officials and Ex-Health Official Plead Not Guilty, **Challenge Indictment**



By MakanDay

Three former Zambia Medicines and Medical Supplies Agency (ZAMMSA) officials and a former Ministry of Health official accused of irregularities in the medicines procurement have pleaded not guilty to seven corruption-related charges before the Economic and Financial Crimes Court (EFCC), where their lawyers immediately challenged the legality of the indictment.

The accused are former ZAMMSA Director General Victor Nyasulu, former Director of Supply Planning Nalishebo Siyandi, former Director of Procurement Habadu Nchimunya, and former Ministry of Health official Dr John Kachimba. They appeared before Magistrate Peter Mungala facing charges of abuse of authority of office and wilful failure to comply with the law and applicable procedure.

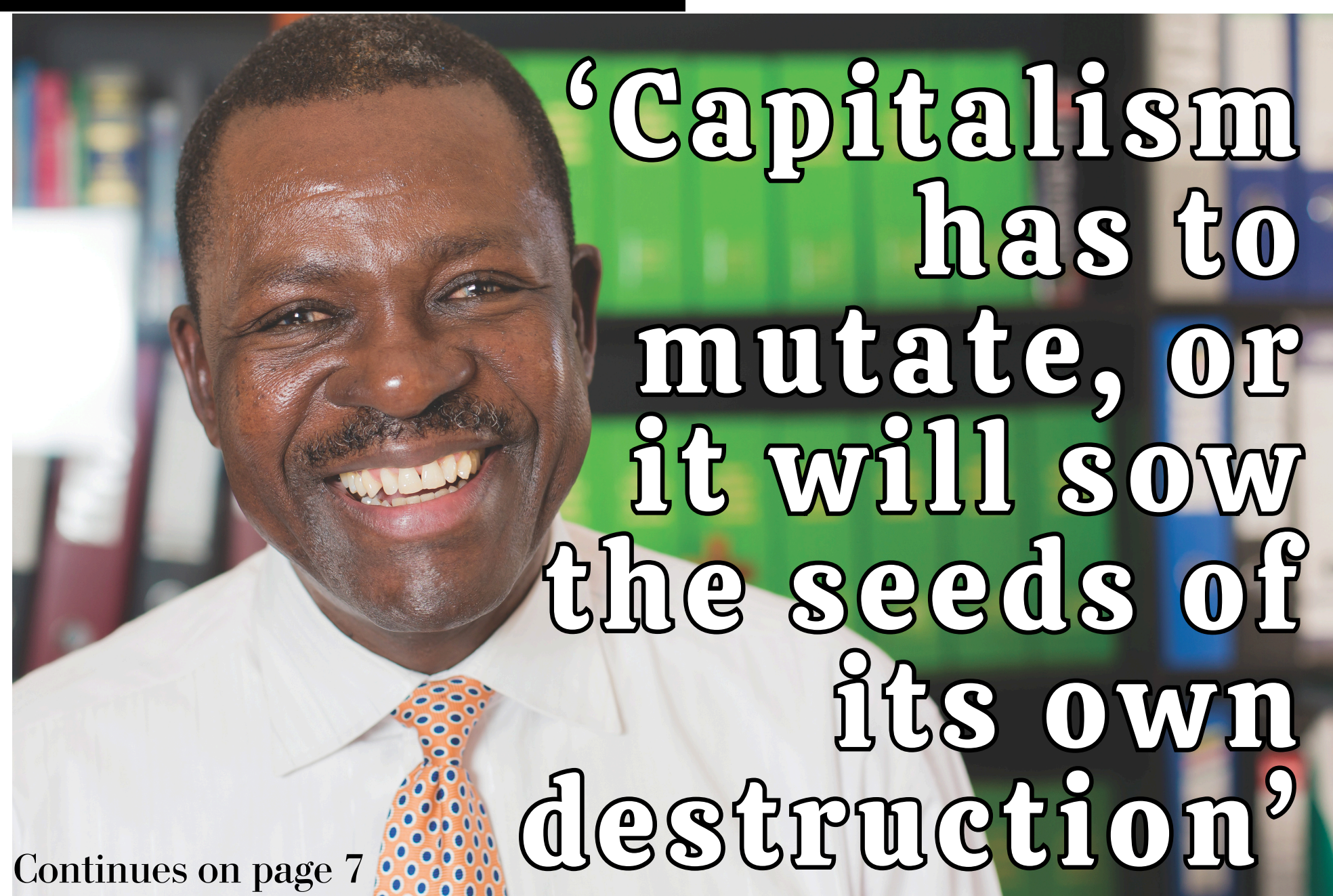
The charges arise from ZAMMSA's 2023–2024 mop-up procurement of essential medicines, medical supplies, anti-cancer medicines, adjuvants and reproductive health commodities.

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Former ZAMMSA Boss Due in Court Over Medicines Procurement Case

By MakanDay

Former Zambia Medicines and Medical Supplies Agency (ZAMMSA) Director General Victor Nyasulu is expected to take plea before the Economic and Financial Crimes Court (EFCC) today in a corruption case linked to the agency's controversial mop-up procurement of medicines and medical supplies, a process previously examined by MakanDay.

The prosecution's allegations arise from a procurement exercise launched by the ZAMMSA in December 2023 to address nationwide shortages of essential medicines. The exercise, which involved contracts worth hundreds of millions of kwacha, was later dogged by allegations of irregularities, including concerns over bid submissions, contract awards, supplier selection and compliance with procurement procedures.

MakanDay's [investigation](#) published in October last year revealed questions surrounding the procurement process, including discrepancies in bidding records, concerns about the participation of certain suppliers, and internal findings pointing to weaknesses in oversight and due diligence.

Nyasulu is jointly charged with former ZAMMSA Director of Supply Planning Nalishebo Siyandi, Director of Procurement Habadu Nchimunya, and medical doctor Dr John Kachimba. The matter is before the Chief Resident Magistrate's Court in Lusaka.

The accused face several counts of abuse of authority of office, contrary to Section 21(1) (a) as read with Section 41 of the Anti-Corruption Act No. 3 of 2012, as well as willful failure to comply with the law and applicable procurement procedures under the Public Procurement Act.

The corruption-related charges are based on allegations that the accused abused their official authority in the award and approval of medicines procurement contracts and, in some instances, failed to follow procurement procedures required under Zambia's public procurement laws. The offences are alleged to have

prejudiced the interests of the Government of Zambia and other bidders.

According to court documents seen by MakanDay, prosecutors allege that between December 2023 and December 2024, Nyasulu, Siyandi and Nchimunya abused their authority by approving a contract awarded to Lumumba Pharmaceuticals Limited despite the company allegedly submitting its bid after the official closing date. The prosecution argues that the decision prejudiced both the Government of Zambia and other bidders.

The allegation mirrors concerns raised during the mop-up procurement exercise, where internal documents reviewed by MakanDay showed that Lumumba Pharmaceuticals was initially listed among companies that had not submitted bids but later appeared in a due diligence assessment conducted after the procurement process.

In another count, the prosecution alleges that the three officials approved contracts exceeding the acceptable threshold established through price reasonableness analysis, contrary to procurement regulations.

Nyasulu is also accused of authorising the receipt of medicines and medical supplies from Cube Pharmaceuticals without following mandatory tender procedures.

Separately, Siyandi is accused of initiating the mop-up procurement exercise using supplier-quoted stock quantities rather than verified national requirements, a decision prosecutors allege was prejudicial to government interests.

The state further alleges that Nyasulu, Siyandi and Nchimunya approved contracts awarded to Cube Pharmaceuticals, Yash Pharmaceuticals and VL Healthnet Limited without any evaluation process having been conducted, contrary to provisions of the Public Procurement Act.

Dr Kachimba faces a separate charge under the Medicines and Allied Substances Act No. 13 of 2013.

Prosecutors allege that on November 9, 2023, while serving as Acting Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, he authorised a waiver of market authorisation requirements for medicines, medical supplies, anti-cancer drugs, adjuvants and reproductive health commodities procured under the mop-up exercise.

At the time, Dr Kachimba, then Medical Superintendent at the University Teaching Hospital, was serving as Acting Permanent Secretary for Administration during the absence of substantive Permanent Secretary Christopher Simoonga, who was reportedly in India for medical review.

Under Section 39 of the Medicines and Allied Substances Act, medicines and allied substances are generally required to obtain marketing authorisation from

ZAMRA before they can be placed on the market. The requirement is intended to ensure that medicines supplied to the public meet prescribed standards of quality, safety and efficacy.

The charges come against the backdrop of wider governance challenges at ZAMMSA. MakanDay's [investigation](#) documented persistent leadership instability at the agency, with multiple director generals serving in quick succession, concerns over political interference in procurement processes, and questions over the transparency of medicine procurement worth hundreds of millions of kwacha.

Nyasulu's appearance today is expected to mark the formal commencement of proceedings in a case that could have significant implications for accountability, procurement oversight and governance within Zambia's public health system.



Former Zambia Medicines and Medical Supplies Agency (ZAMMSA) Director General Victor Nyasulu

Former ZAMMSA Officials and Ex-Health Official Plead Not Guilty, Challenge Indictment

From page 1

The prosecution alleges that the accused irregularly approved contracts under the procurement exercise, including awarding a contract to Lumumba Pharmaceuticals Limited despite the company allegedly submitting its bid after the invitation had closed. The indictment further alleges that contracts were awarded in a manner prejudicial to the Government, that some exceeded the prescribed price reasonableness threshold, and that medicines were received from Cube Pharmaceuticals without the required tender procedures.

Prosecutors alleges that contracts were awarded to Cube Pharmaceuticals, Yash Pharmaceuticals and VL Healthnet Limited without any evaluation being conducted, contrary to the Public Procurement Act.

The prosecution called Zambia Public Procurement Authority (ZPPA) Contracts and Procurement Audit Manager Gilbert Mbewe as its first witness.

Mbewe testified that his responsibilities include ensuring government procurement processes are conducted transparently, efficiently and in compliance with the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020, as amended by Act No. 17 of 2023.

Before the trial could proceed further, defence lawyers Boniface Chiwala, representing Nyasulu, Brian Kabika, representing Siyandi, and Boniface Ngalasa of Boniface Ngalasa & Company Advocates, representing Habadu, raised a preliminary objection. They argued that several counts in the indictment were defective and did not meet the requirements of Section 134 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

The defence submitted that the charges failed to disclose the essential ingredients of the offence of abuse of authority of office under Section 21 of the Anti-Corruption Act. Counsel argued that the prosecution had not alleged that any of the accused, or their relatives or associates, obtained a direct or indirect benefit from the alleged conduct,

which they contended was necessary for the offence to be sustained.

The defence argued that the indictment failed to provide sufficient particulars to reasonably inform the accused persons of the nature of the allegations, thereby prejudicing their ability to prepare an effective defence.

The defence further maintained that objections relating to defective indictments could be raised at any stage of the proceedings because constitutional protections take precedence over procedural rules.

State prosecutor and Deputy Chief State Advocate in the Taxation and Financial Crimes Department, Gracilia Mulenga, opposed the application and urged the court to dismiss the objection.

The prosecution argued that any challenge to the indictment ought to have been raised during the pre-trial conference, where defence lawyers had indicated that they had no objections. It submitted that the subsequent amendment to the indictment merely corrected statutory references to the Anti-Corruption Act and did not alter the substance of the allegations.

The State further maintained that the indictment complies with Section 134 of the Criminal Procedure Code because each count clearly identifies the alleged offence and provides sufficient particulars to inform the accused persons of the case they are required to answer.

On the abuse of authority charges, the prosecution argued that the alleged arbitrary approval of contracts contrary to procurement procedures was sufficient to disclose an offence under the Anti-Corruption Act and that the statutory presumptions relied upon by the defence were matters for the court to consider during trial rather than essential elements that had to be pleaded in the indictment.

Magistrate Mungala adjourned the matter to 25 June 2026 for continuation of proceedings.

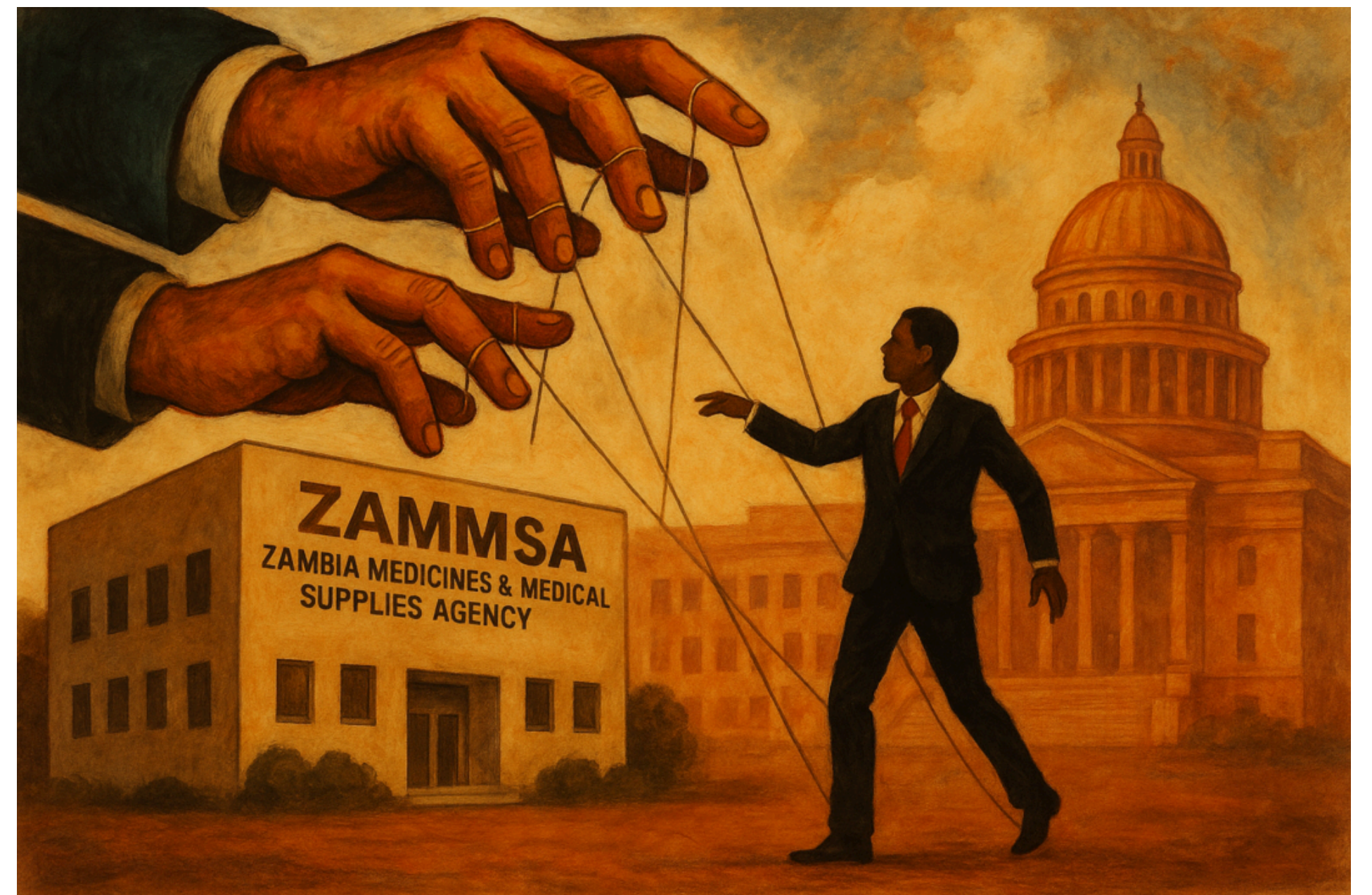


Photo Credit / The AI-generated image is an artistic symbol of political interference and institutional manipulation within Zambia's medical supply system. At the centre, a man in a suit stands as a puppet figure, his movements controlled by large hands holding puppet strings descending from above. The hands symbolise powerful political forces exerting control over ZAMMSA, represented by the building in the foreground.

Susan Mulala: The 26-Year-Old Seeking to Make History in Mwense

From page 1

By Linda Soko Tembo

When Susan Mulala received her parliamentary nomination, she faced a difficult choice. Attend the graduation ceremony she had worked years to reach, or return home to campaign. She chose the campaign trail.

The decision reflected the determination that has come to define the 26-year-old social worker, who is now seeking to become the first woman elected Member of Parliament for Mwense Central Constituency.

Mulala, who graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Zambia in May 2026, is contesting the parliamentary seat against veteran politician David Mabumba, a former Minister of Education who represented the constituency for 15 years under the Patriotic Front and is now contesting under the Tonse Alliance.

Born in Loto Village in Mwense district, Mulala represents a new generation of political leaders attempting to reshape perceptions about youth and women's participation in governance.

Her emergence on the political scene has not been without challenges. According to Mulala, some critics have questioned her age and suitability for leadership, arguing that public office should be reserved for older and more experienced individuals.

"People would say, 'She is too young to come and work for big people like you. How can such a young girl be adopted?' Those are some of the messages that are being spread," Mulala says.

She believes such attitudes reflect longstanding cultural perceptions that can make it difficult for young people, particularly young women, to assume leadership roles in rural communities.

Yet her candidacy has also generated enthusiasm among many women and young people across the constituency. Since Zambia's independence, Mwense Central Constituency in Luapula Province has never elected a female Member of Parliament, making her campaign a potentially historic one.

Susan Mulala: The 26-Year-Old Seeking to Make History in Mwense cont...

“Many women and youths saw my adoption as a sign that leadership is not determined by age or gender. It showed that even a young woman from a rural community can aspire to represent her people,” she says.

Mulala says her nomination followed extensive community consultations, during which residents expressed a desire for fresh leadership and new ideas to address local development challenges.

Unlike many established politicians who have access to significant financial resources and extensive political networks, she says her campaign has largely been sustained through contributions from community members and well-wishers.

“My campaign is supported through contributions from community members and well-wishers. I remain committed to transparency and ensuring that any support I receive does not compromise my values or the interests of the people I seek to represent,” she says.

Mulala acknowledges that limited access to campaign financing remains one of the biggest obstacles facing young people and women seeking public office. However, she views the support she has received as evidence that her campaign is rooted in grassroots backing rather than financial influence.

Raised in a family of seven children, Mulala says her upbringing in rural Mwense exposed her to many of the challenges residents continue to face today. From overcrowded classrooms and poorly equipped health facilities to limited economic opportunities, she says those experiences shaped her desire to enter public service.

The daughter of Nelson Mulala and Mercy Chongo, both natives of Mwense District, she believes her background has helped her understand the everyday realities facing ordinary citizens.

As a trained social worker, she has worked closely with families, young people and vulnerable communities. She says the experience provided firsthand insight into the social and economic issues affecting many households

and strengthened her desire to contribute to policy and development at a broader level.

Among the leaders who inspire her are Zambia’s Vice President and Minister Sylvia Masebo, whom she admires for their resilience, dedication and commitment to public service.

If elected, Mulala says she would focus on improving access to quality education, strengthening healthcare services, expanding opportunities for young people and promoting women’s economic participation.

Her plans include advocating for additional classrooms and improved learning facilities, supporting better-equipped health centres, promoting skills development and entrepreneurship among young people, and expanding economic empowerment programmes for women.

She believes one of the greatest challenges facing women in politics is overcoming stereotypes and cultural barriers that often discourage participation.

According to Mulala, women candidates frequently face discrimination, limited access to resources and intimidation, making it harder to compete on equal footing with their male counterparts.

She argues that stronger mentorship programmes, greater support within political parties and safer political environments are necessary to increase women’s representation in public office.

Mulala’s candidacy has also sparked discussion about the role of young people in political leadership. While many residents have welcomed her emergence as a sign of changing attitudes toward women and youth in politics, others have questioned whether young candidates possess sufficient experience for public office.

Prof. Dickson Mwansa, founder of the Zambian Open University and Sub-Chief Musangu of Chief Lubunda’s chiefdom in Mwense district, says Mulala’s decision to contest should be viewed as a positive sign of growing youth participation in governance.



“She demonstrated leadership qualities during her time at the University of Zambia, but experience remains important in public office, especially when competing against more seasoned politicians,” he says.

Similarly, Bishop Fumi Mutale of Cornerstone Tabernacle in Mwanabombwe district says age should not be a barrier to leadership but argues that voters must ultimately assess a candidate’s ability to deliver.

“The question is not age but whether a candidate is equal to the task,” he says, adding that education and youthful energy must be matched by wisdom, competence and the capacity to serve constituents effectively.

A strong supporter of gender equality, Mulala also advocates for policies aimed at protecting women and children. She supports stronger measures against child marriage, expanded educational opportunities for girls, improved child protection systems and increased access to economic opportunities for women.

On youth issues, she emphasises the importance of reproductive health education,

youth-friendly health services and economic empowerment programmes that can help reduce vulnerability among young people.

Her vision extends beyond Mwense Central. She says she wants to see a Zambia where women and girls are respected, empowered and given equal opportunities to lead, and where leadership is judged by competence, commitment and service rather than age or gender.

As Zambia heads toward the 13 August general election, Mulala represents a growing number of young leaders seeking to redefine political participation and challenge traditional assumptions about leadership.

Whether she wins the election or not, her candidacy has already sparked conversations about youth leadership, women’s representation and the future of politics in rural constituencies.

For many young women in Mwense, her presence on the ballot represents something larger than a single campaign. It is a reminder that leadership can emerge from unexpected places and that political office is not reserved for one generation alone.

From page 1

Bus Drivers Allege Political Pressure at Lusaka Stations Ahead of 2026 Elections

Clara Chisenga reports that drivers at some Lusaka bus stations allege pressure to wear ruling party regalia and preferential treatment for operators perceived to support the UPND, reviving concerns that political influence remains embedded in Zambia's transport hubs.

Every Friday, a bus driver at Lumumba Bus Station says he faces a choice: wear a red beret associated with the ruling United Party for National Development (UPND) or risk paying a penalty and losing valuable loading time.

The driver, who asked not to be identified for fear of victimisation, is among several operators who told MakaanDay they are experiencing increasing political pressure at some Lusaka bus stations ahead of Zambia's August 2026 general elections.

The allegations are strongly disputed by the UPND. The party says there is no evidence that political caderism has resurfaced in Lusaka bus stations and describes the claims as attempts to generate political debate ahead of the elections. "We cannot react to what drivers are saying," said UPND Media Director Mark Simuwe. "We need evidence that caderism has resurfaced, especially considering that bus stations accommodate people affiliated with different political parties."

However, interviews conducted with drivers operating on the Chongwe route and at Lumumba and Kulima Tower bus stations, supported by independent observations by MakaanDay, revealed consistent accounts of individuals claiming authority at the stations allegedly encouraging operators to wear ruling party regalia and favouring those perceived to be aligned with the UPND.

At Kulima Tower Bus Station in the centre of the city, this journalist waited more than 40 minutes to meet the overall station chairperson, commonly known as "Faza", who was reportedly attending what appeared to be a mobilisation meeting. Despite waiting, she was unable to speak with him.

During the visit, several route leaders clad in UPND regalia were observed entering the station office. UPND campaign materials, including berets, caps, T-shirts, overalls and wrappers,

were openly displayed for sale near the drivers' office. A vendor was heard encouraging drivers entering the station to purchase the items, saying it would make identification easier.

The observations appeared consistent with drivers' claims that party activity has become increasingly visible at some stations ahead of the August elections.

President Hakainde Hichilema pledged to end political caderism when he took office in 2021. Nearly five years later, several drivers who spoke to MakaanDay alleged that individuals commonly referred to as "Ba Committee" encourage operators to wear ruling party regalia on Fridays and penalise those who refuse.

"If you are not wearing the regalia associated with the ruling party, you are charged K100. If you do not pay, you may not be allowed to load your vehicle on that day," one driver alleged.

Drivers also claimed that operators perceived to be aligned with the ruling party are sometimes given priority when loading passengers.

"Sometimes some buses are given preference while those already in the queue wait for their turn. When you ask why, you are told, 'niba chipani' meaning they are from the ruling party," another driver said.

Several drivers said they were reluctant to speak publicly for fear of victimisation or losing access to operating spaces at the stations.

Historical Concerns Over Caderism

Political caderism became a major public concern during the Patriotic Front administration, when political cadres controlled markets and bus stations, collecting illegal levies, intimidating traders and transport operators, and in some cases engaging in violence.

The issue became a prominent campaign theme during the 2021 elections, with then-opposition leader Hichilema promising to restore order and

remove political influence from the management of public facilities.

Bus and Taxi Owners Association of Zambia Deputy Secretary General Peter Phiri said caderism remains a concern in some stations and singled out Kulima Tower as one of the locations where political influence is most visible.

"I will give you an example if I start with Kulima Tower. Kulima Tower is one picture that has been very visible. It has become more political in terms of its operation," he said.

Phiri said operators had repeatedly complained of political interference and alleged that drivers perceived to oppose the ruling party struggled to operate freely at some stations.

"They have dominated these stations in such a way that anyone who is anti their party cannot survive and cannot operate in these stations," he alleged.

He further alleged that buses are sometimes selected to transport people to political events and that operators who decline risk being sidelined.

Phiri said bus stations should remain places of business, not political mobilisation.

"These are places where people earn a living and contribute taxes to government. They should be free from political interference," he said.

He called on authorities to enforce the law fairly and investigate complaints raised by operators.

One driver who requested anonymity also urged authorities to investigate what he described as illegal activities occurring at some stations.

Council Rejects Allegations

The Lusaka City Council, which is responsible for regulating and managing markets and bus stations in the capital, dismissed the allegations, saying it has intensified patrols through its police unit to maintain order at the facilities.

"I therefore refute the claims that caderism has resurfaced in Lusaka bus stations," said Public Relations Manager Chola Mwamba. "The call boys present are there to facilitate business for transporters, and that cannot be termed as caderism."

Mwamba said the council's constitutional and statutory mandate requires it to ensure order, safety and smooth operations in markets and bus stations across the city.

Police Yet to Receive Complaints

Zambia Police Service Spokesperson Godfrey Chilabi said the Police had not received any formal complaints regarding allegations that individuals linked to the ruling party were collecting illegal payments from bus drivers or exerting political pressure at bus stations.

"We have not received any complaints relating to such incidents in bus stations," Chilabi said.

He noted that the law is clear regarding the collection of levies in markets and bus stations.

"When it comes to revenue collection and payments in bus stations, bus stops and markets, such levies are supposed to be paid to the local authority," he said.

However, Chilabi said the police would be prepared to investigate the matter should evidence or formal complaints be presented.

"We can investigate the matter to establish what is happening on the ground," he added.

RTSA Distances Itself

The Road Transport and Safety Agency (RTSA) said allegations of criminal activity at bus stations fall under the jurisdiction of the Zambia Police Service, not the agency.

"The people who are supposed to deal with criminal activities are the police," said RTSA Head of Public Relations Chilufya Mwelwa. "Our mandate is to regulate the transport sector and penalise non-compliant motor vehicles and drivers."

Bus Drivers Allege Political Pressure at Lusaka Stations Ahead of 2026 Elections cont....

Mwelwa urged public service vehicle operators to comply with the Road Traffic Act and other transport regulations throughout the election period.

UPND Dismisses Claims

Simuwe said the ruling party could not act on allegations alone without evidence that drivers were being forced to wear party regalia or pay money at bus stations.

He maintained that both

President Hakainde Hichilema and the UPND remain opposed to caderism.

“Anyone found engaging in caderism will face the law. The position of both President Hakainde Hichilema

and the UPND has not changed,” he said.

Clara Chisenga is a journalist from Radio Icengelo in Kitwe. She is currently undertaking a three-month internship at MakaanDay after earning third place in the 2025 MakaanDay Awards for Investigative Journalism.



OPINION

It's Pressure Season for Politicians

Election season has a way of exposing the true nature of politics. It is the time when politicians suddenly become highly visible, communities receive an influx of campaign visits, and promises flow more freely than at any other point in the electoral cycle. It is, quite simply, pressure season for politicians.

How one wishes politics were driven entirely by a genuine desire to serve rather than to be served. If that were the case, politicians would not have to work so hard to persuade citizens to vote for them every five years. Their record in office would speak louder than campaign slogans, rallies or expensive billboards.

Unfortunately, that is rarely the case.

As Zambia heads towards another general election, politicians from across the political divide

find themselves under immense pressure to convince voters that they deserve another chance—or that they deserve one for the first time. Incumbents are defending their records while challengers are selling hope.

Both understand that, ultimately, voters will judge them not only by what they say today but also by what they have done over the past five years.

Government leaders point to achievements such as debt restructuring, infrastructure development, expanded Constituency Development Fund allocations, economic reforms and improvements in selected macroeconomic indicators. These are developments that deserve recognition.

Yet many ordinary citizens continue

to judge government performance through a much simpler lens: Can they afford food? Do they have stable jobs? Can they pay school fees? Can they access quality healthcare? Are they better off today than they were five years ago?

For many households, the answer remains uncertain.

Poverty continues to affect a significant proportion of Zambia's population despite improvements in some areas of the economy. High food prices, youth unemployment, corruption and the rising cost of living remain everyday concerns for millions of citizens. Although the economy has shown signs of improvement, many households have yet to feel the benefits in their daily lives.

This gap between national

economic indicators and people's lived experiences partly explains why election campaigns have become so intense. Politicians know they cannot rely solely on speeches or statistics. They must convince voters that they understand the realities facing ordinary people and, more importantly, that they have practical solutions.

Opposition politicians have been quick to capitalise on these frustrations. Speaking at a campaign rally in Nyimba district, Eastern Province, on 24 June, Tonse Alliance presidential candidate Brian Mundubile criticised President Hakainde Hichilema's administration, arguing that it has focused too much on economic indicators and winning international approval while failing to improve the daily lives of ordinary Zambians.

It's Pressure Season for Politicians cont..

Whether one agrees with that assessment or not, such messages resonate with voters whose circumstances have changed little despite positive reports about the economy.

What voters should know, however, is that there will be an economic storm if whoever wins the August 13 polls goes on spending money that we do not have. Like a house built on shaky ground, the country's economy is bound to collapse in such a storm, economists have repeatedly warned. We have seen this before, particularly from 2011 onwards. Yet, most of the time, we as voters miss the bigger picture. We look up to politicians to generate wealth and share it with us, when their real responsibility is to create an environment in which businesses can grow, jobs can be created and citizens can build wealth for themselves.

The lesson for those in government is straightforward. Economic reforms, debt restructuring and improved economic indicators are important, but they must ultimately translate into tangible improvements in people's lives. If more citizens had secured decent jobs, if more eligible students had accessed bursaries, and if more households had experienced a meaningful improvement in their standard of living, the pressure facing the ruling party during this election season would likely be far less intense.

In the absence of those improvements, promises by those seeking to unseat the incumbents become increasingly attractive, even though solving such challenges is often far more complex than campaign rhetoric suggests.

The pressure, however, should not rest solely on politicians. Voters also have a responsibility to make their voices heard between elections, not only during campaign season. They should continually ask difficult questions, demand explanations when public services fail, and hold elected leaders accountable for the promises they make.

Likewise, voters should look beyond campaign gifts, political slogans and emotional appeals. Elections should not become contests over who makes the biggest promises or

attracts the largest crowds. Instead, they should be opportunities to assess leadership records, scrutinise policy proposals and reward those who have demonstrated competence, integrity and a genuine commitment to public service.

Voters also have a responsibility to look beyond campaign gifts, political slogans and emotional appeals. Elections should not become contests of who promises the most or who holds the biggest rallies. They should be opportunities to scrutinise leadership records, question policy proposals and demand accountability.

Democracy functions best when politicians earn votes through performance and integrity rather than persuasion alone. Likewise, it flourishes when citizens reward competence instead of personality, tribe or short-term incentives.

As campaigns intensify in the coming weeks, politicians will undoubtedly ask for trust once again. But trust is not built during campaign season—it is earned over years of consistent leadership, transparency and service.

Pressure season has arrived. The question is whether politicians will respond genuinely or simply another round of familiar promises.

This week in the Bulletin & Record

‘Capitalism has to mutate, or it will sow the seeds of its own destruction’

Johan Rahm talks to Wynter Kabimba*

Wynter Kabimba greets me with a big smile and asks me to sit down in an armchair in his office. The walls of his small ministerial office are covered in crowded bookshelves. On the desk too, are piles of books and documents. “I never sit behind that desk, I always use one of the visitors chairs,” he says. “I’m more comfortable working from there, not looking like a big man.”

Wynter Kabimba holds two important offices in Zambia. As Secretary General for the Patriotic Front party and as Minister of Justice he is very influential. Many people argue that he is one of the architects of the PF. But is he aiming even higher, to the top political office of the country? His answer to that is enigmatic.

“My mindset,” he says, “is that I will serve this country now and for as long as people want me to serve it. Don’t forget that before I came here I was in private practice as a lawyer. I became senior lawyer in the profession. So for me, this is just about service.”

Mr Kabimba studied law and graduated from UNZA, and has worked as a lawyer for many years. What made him choose to go in to politics and public service?

“After graduating from law school I joined a political organisation, Lusaka City Council, as a youngster in the legal department. My first contact with the world, so to say, after the academic world was with politicians. At the time I worked with that group of elected representatives of the people and I think it is that contact got me interested in politics. These were very humble men and women. Not highly educated, but entrusted with the responsibility of resolving the problems of the local people in the townships, dealing with issues of water and road infrastructure. I think I started to share their passion of public service.”

The Patriotic Front has been in power for almost three years and Mr Kabimba has been in the inner circle of the party from the beginning. When I ask him if he is happy with what they have achieved in Government this far, the reply comes immediately.

“Yes, but we can do more”

What achievements is he most proud of?

“Firstly, the fact that we kicked out MMD. That was a major success and it continues to make me happy today. Secondly, the fact that we have mounted a very strong and vicious crusade against corruption in public office, which had become a common feature if not a culture under MMD. Thirdly, the fact that

we are now able to restore confidence in our major public institutions, such as the judiciary.”

You said you have a lot more work to do. What are the priorities?

“The transformation of the lives of our people is paramount. I do not think that in the last two years our people have seen a drastic change in their livelihood. They are still expecting more from this government. The challenge is that we are coming from a background of the MMD and have inherited a public service, which itself must be an engine to drive our social and economic programme, that is still stippled in to this “devil do it” attitude. But I think we are getting somewhere.”

Mr. Kabimba fingers a band of big braids that he has been holding in his hands. It is for stress relief. After the interview his press aide, who sits in on the interview, says that the braids has gotten him in to problems. Some people have accused him of using it for witchcraft.

We start talking about another of the issues on top of the agenda for the PF Government; the education system.

“We should ensure that every child must have the opportunity to be enrolled in primary education. Not only enrolled, they must have the opportunity to go up to tertiary level. The challenge we had in the past is that the system is like a pyramid, as you go up the number of students is getting smaller and smaller. That means you are running an educational system that is targeting to produce an elitist group of people in society. Immediately you do that you cannot fight poverty.

“The gap between the poor and the small group at the top is only widening. What we ought to do is to turn that pyramid, so that every child who gets in to primary school must have an opportunity to get a diploma. That is why we heard the President make pronouncements that we should build a university in at least every province. Here we are 50 years after independence with basically two universities. I don’t want to express my opinion about the private universities that are mushrooming, but I can tell you that they are not up to the standard of what the 21st century is looking for. We need to build more public universities. We need to produce

‘Capitalism has to mutate, or it will sow the seeds of its own destruction’ cont....

citizens that understand their social conditions, their regional conditions and their international, globalized conditions.

In the background a TV is running, giving us the latest news around the world as a backdrop to the interview. The air conditioner is humming, adding to the background noise. When Mr. Kabimba starts to talk with a low voice about the challenges in the health sector it becomes difficult to hear him.

“We have a dualistic way of life in our country. A good number of our people, especially in the countryside, still believe in traditional medicine, against conventional medicine. One of the tasks we have is to move these people from this end to the other end. Because doing so is actually improving their way of life. But you can only do so if they can have access to health facilities. If for example the nearest health facility they have is a traditional healer then certainly that is where they will go.

“We want the clinic with the conventional medicine, with trained doctors and nurses, to be the nearest place for them. Now, people in my village, have to choose between going to the clinic, which is 15 to 20 km away and going to see a traditional healer in the village. They will go to the traditional healer and even believe that the traditional healer can cure AIDS. They are being put in that situation not out of their own choice, but because of a lack of accessibility. What we want to do now is to cut down on those distances to health centres so that they become their first point of call.”

An expansive politic on both health and education is costly. How would these reforms be financed?

“It will not take a short period of time. But the longest journey starts with the first step. We are taking a first step and we have no illusions that this is going to be a short journey. But that should not dissuade us, or prevent us, or discourage us from taking the first step. Initially it will be costly, but ultimately it will be less costly because we are going to have a citizenry that is educated and healthy.”

Talking about costs and planning. Zambia has had enormous growth over the last ten to 15 years. But poverty does not seem to move in proportion to those figures. Why is that?

“I am not an economist, but a lawyer. As a citizen, I have never understood that contradiction. On one hand you have all these flamboyant figures, that sound very good in the ears of economists, that this country is growing with between five and eight per cent every year. On the other hand you have levels of poverty that are growing. So I don’t understand from a common sense perspective how high growth can lead to more poverty. This contradiction just shows that there is something wrong with the policy implementation. But also what it means is that that growth is just for a small group of people. Again I go back to the issue of the elite. Growth must be people centered. I don’t think that the growth in the last 10 to 15 years have been people centered.”

In a global capitalistic world, is it possible to make that change? There are a lot of foreign investors in Zambia now. Could it be that the growth is just leaving the country?

“The emerging school of thought now is that even capitalism itself has to mutate. Because if it doesn’t it will lead to social unrest that we have seen in other countries. If social unrest becomes the norm then investment is at risk, be it foreign or local. I think if capitalism is going to be the world economic order then it must be a system that drives people-centered economics, not profit-centered economics. If it doesn’t, it will meet the Marxist theorem and kill itself. It will sow its own seeds of destruction. If the social unrest around the world because of the economic deprivation continues the situation will be such that nobody can go to sleep peacefully. So capitalism has a challenge in the 21st century.”

Then the role of government will then be to make sure to create a system in which the companies are forced to take social responsibility?

“Exactly, and that is why the argument that the government should disengage completely from economic

activities has collapsed completely.”

What is your plan to tame the capitalism or big investors?

“It is very difficult to tame capitalism; it’s a tsunami of the world. The way you try to tame it is to ensure that you have leadership that is people centered and more insular before it becomes global. We have to look at our conditions before we can claim to be part of a global world and therefore we ought to ensure that the parameters of the economy become balanced between foreign investors and local investors. More and more Zambians should start participating in economic activities. The competition should be between foreign and local investors and not foreign to foreign investors, because the objectives of the foreign investors are basically the same, to make profit. We have to shift the parameters and encourage our citizens to be part of the economic activities.”

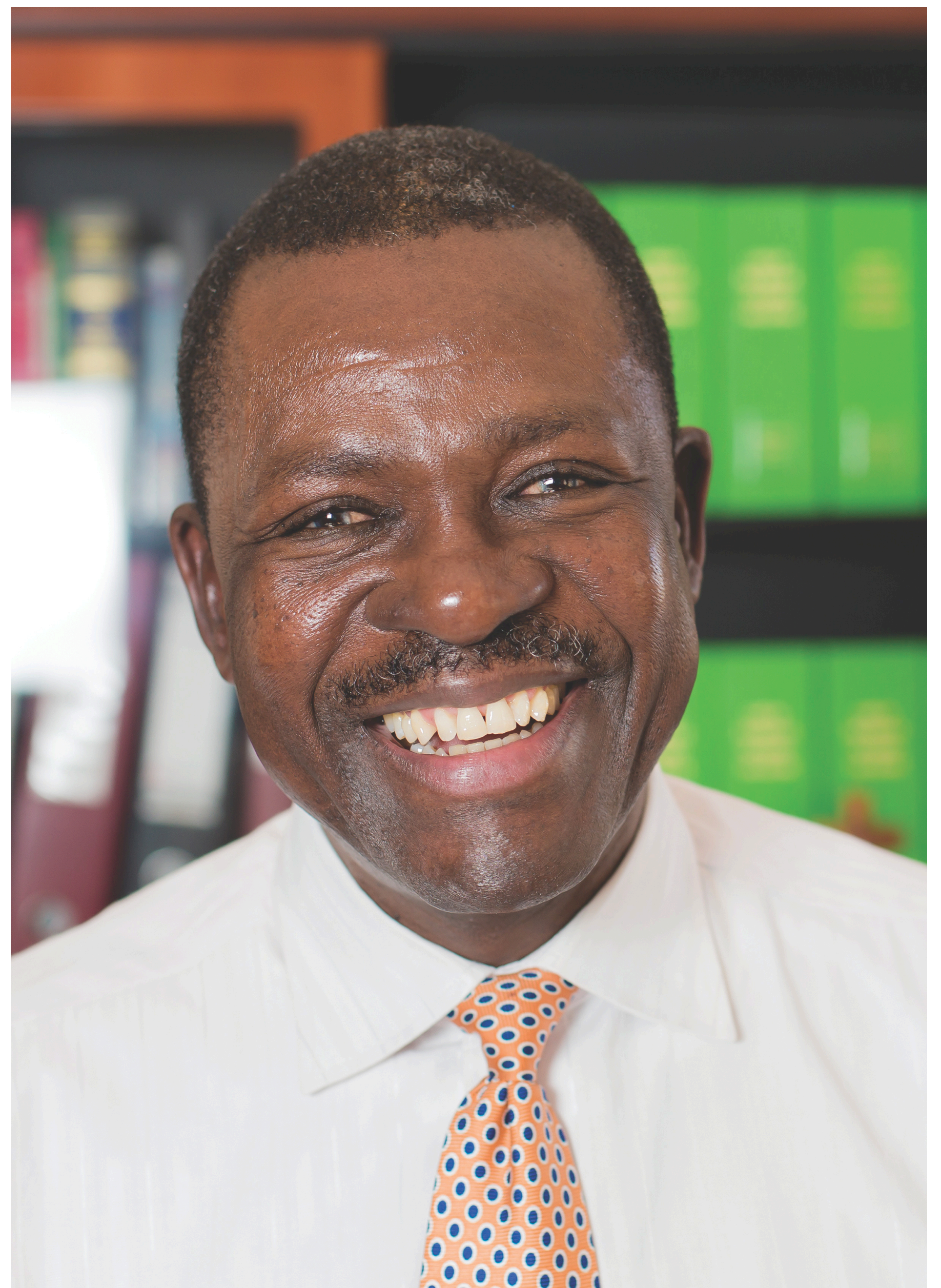
You mentioned social unrest. Do you think there is a risk in Zambia, if the elite continue to grow at the same time as there is no reduction in poverty, that we will see more social unrest?

“That is a common phenomenon in the world. It is a law of nature and Zambia can be no exception. We always have to be cautious of that, so that we end social unrest by ensuring that we create an egalitarian or semi-egalitarian society. The voices of the majority must become the voices that should influence and drive the economy.”

Would you like the Government to be more included in the economy, by, for example, running more businesses?

“Definitely! I think the phenomenon that the government should completely disengage from the state economic participation is wrong. And that has been proven.”

During the close to three years the PF has been in power a lot of public clashes between Government and foreign companies have been reported in media. For example, governmental representatives have warned foreign companies to not lay off workers. How does Mr. Kabimba see the responsibilities of foreign investors in Zambia?



‘Capitalism has to mutate, or it will sow the seeds of its own destruction’ cont....

“For example, we have to make sure that the extractive industry is regulated to create employment. One of the problems we face is that the extractive industry has become so mechanised that it is not contributing to employment creation. You see big excavators coming in to do a job that is supposed to be done by 200 or 300 Zambians. This is a third world country so the issue of employment creation is still fundamental. The multinationals argue that they need to maximize their profits. Yes, that is a rational argument, but that is not only what they come here for. They also come here to help create employment so that income distribution and buying power is enhanced. The minerals belong to the Zambians. We must have a win-win situation and we can only achieve that with a regulatory framework.

Many of the issues we have discussed have their basis in what ideology you choose to guide you. How would you describe the PF ideology?

It is very difficult today to describe a political party's ideological formations. But whatever ideology you would like to put as a tag, the Patriotic Front philosophy is that we are a people-centered political party. Our major client, in whatever we do, is the ordinary person. The people that do not know how to play the role of the advocate to attend what they want to attend. Those are our clients. So whatever tag you want to give to that philosophical formation, that is what we are.

The interview is over. Mr. Kabimba hurries from his office. He is late for lunch with his wife.

*** Johan Rahm is a Swedish media consultant who at the time was working in Zambia. He was co-founder of The Junior Reporter magazine.**

