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Nearly K100 Million Paid, But Solwezi Roads Remain Unfinished

With only 3.3 kilometres tarred, MakaanDay examines conflicting explanations for the delays, questions surrounding subcontractors and whether the project can be completed by March 2027.

By Stanley Fwataka | Solwezi

From page 1

A K272 million government-funded road project in Solwezi has missed its original March 2026 completion deadline, amid conflicting accounts of payments made to the contractor and growing concerns over the slow pace of construction.

Solwezi Municipal Council says approximately K100.48 million has been paid to JDCON Zambia Limited. However, the contractor maintains that only K97 million has been released and that no further payments have been received since July 2026.

The contractor also argues that deductions relating to a 20% advance payment have reduced the funds available for ongoing construction works, contributing to cash-flow constraints.

By October 2026, only 3.3 kilometres of the planned 12.01-kilometre road network had been tarred, approximately 17 months after the project's official launch in May 2025.

The delays affect the Zambia–Kimasala Road to Kyawama Roundabout, Messenger–Kazomba Road to town, and Stadium–Faith Academy Road to Mitec — routes serving communities in a rapidly expanding mining town.

JDCON previously attributed delays partly to late government payments. However, the council told MakaanDay on 13 October 2026 that all interim payment certificates submitted by the contractor had since been settled.

A growing town, unfinished roads

Solwezi's rapid growth, driven largely by copper mining, has increased pressure on its roads and drainage systems.

Census figures show that the town's urban population more than tripled, from 96,725 in 2010 to 305,027 in 2022.

In an earlier investigation, MakaanDay established

that Kansanshi Mining Plc financed K74.36 million in roadworks between 2021 and 2025 through an arrangement allowing approved expenditure to be offset against municipal property rates.

The roadworks accounted for 17.8% of the company's rates obligations to the council over the period, with the balance paid in cash.

Meanwhile, the separately government-funded township roads project awarded to JDCON has continued beyond its original completion date.

Officially launched on 16 May 2025 by then North-Western Province Minister Rebert Lihefu, the project had reached only 3.3 kilometres of tarred road by October 2026, according to the council engineer.

That represents 27.5% of the 12.01 kilometres reported by the engineer, leaving 8.71 kilometres untarred. However, earlier reports put the project's total length at 10.1 kilometres, a discrepancy that remains unexplained.

The figures suggest an average surfacing rate of about 194 metres per month since the launch. Although construction began earlier and the pace may vary between stages, the remaining work raises questions about whether the contractor can meet the reported March 2027 deadline.

A visit to the project sites by this reporter found workers carrying out drainage works, but no road construction activity by the main contractor, JDCON, was observed at the time of the inspection.

The inspection also revealed varying levels of progress across the affected roads. The Highland–Kimasala Road was impassable to motorists, while the Zambia–Kimasala Road had been partially worked on. Along the Faith Academy–Stadium Road, drainage construction was

ongoing, but road surfacing had yet to begin.

Meanwhile, no construction activity was observed along the Kyawama and Messenger–Kazomba road sections during the visit.

Contractor's payment explanation questioned

In a public statement issued on 28 August 2026, JDCON Zambia Limited said construction was progressing in line with payments received and that it was mobilising equipment, materials, workers and subcontractors.

Solwezi Municipal Council engineer David Pendeke acknowledged that delayed payments had previously affected construction and formed part of the contractor's justification for seeking an extension. However, he said government cash flow had improved in recent months.

"For the past, I think, six months or five months, I think the cash flow has improved now," Pendeke said.

According to Pendeke, approximately K100.48 million had been paid against the K272 million contract sum, equivalent to 36.9% of the contract value.

He maintained that all interim payment certificates submitted by the contractor had been settled.

"There is no money that the government is owing," Pendeke said, referring to the submitted certificates.

However, JDCON disputed the council's payment figures.

In a WhatsApp exchange with MakaanDay, the contractor maintained that only K97 million, approximately 36% of the contract value, had been released.

"We have not received any payments from July (2026)," the representative said, adding: "There is no 100million paid to us."

The contractor further confirmed that deductions relating to a 20% advance payment had reduced the amount available for ongoing construction works to approximately 16% of the project value.

The contractor's account raises questions about how much money has been available for ongoing construction. However, its claim that advance-payment deductions reduced this amount to approximately 16% of the contract value remains unverified and requires examination of payment certificates and advance-payment recovery records.

The conflicting accounts also leave unresolved whether payments were made after July 2026, whether any certified amounts remain outstanding, and whether deductions account for part of the difference between the council's and contractor's figures.

MakaanDay has not independently verified the payment certificates, bank transfers or advance-payment recovery records.

The payments also cannot be directly compared with the kilometres tarred because the contract covers drainage, culverts and other construction works.

Contractor reportedly granted another year

Pendeke said JDCON applied for an eight-month extension but was reportedly granted 12 months under a wider Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development decision affecting similar projects.

He understood the revised completion date to be around March 2027 but said the council had not received the complete extension documentation. The ministry has yet to confirm the revised deadline in writing.

Subcontractors face questions over selection and registration

Questions have also emerged over the selection

Nearly K100 Million Paid, But Solwezi Roads Remain Unfinished cont....

and performance of companies reportedly subcontracted to undertake drainage and culvert works.

MakanDay identified eight reported subcontractors: Mulefu Mining and Construction Limited, Isunga Building and Civil Engineering Limited, Baraka Traders and Contractors Limited, NNS Investments and Construction Limited, Orbit Engineering Limited, Tungenu Construction Limited, Easy Concept Construction Limited and Tukimus Company Limited.

Pendeke said the ministry had proposed several subcontractors, some of whom struggled to mobilise because they lacked advance payments and were expected to begin work using their own resources.

However, he said subcontractor difficulties could not fully explain the delays because JDCON could continue work on road sections not awaiting drainage structures.

"Blaming the subcontractors 100% is not fair," he said.

A review of Patents and Companies Registration Agency (PACRA) company records, identified the registered shareholders of seven of the reported subcontractors.

Mulefu Mining and Construction Limited is majority-owned by Subeta Kyambakuka Mutelo, who holds 80% of its shares. NNS Investments and Construction Limited is majority-owned by Needy Sabuni, with 75%, while Orbit Engineering Limited lists Lisa Mweni as holding approximately 96.7% of its issued shares.

The remaining companies have two shareholders each, with equal shareholdings recorded for Isunga Building and Civil Engineering, Baraka Traders and Contractors, Easy Concept Construction and Tukimus Company.

A separate search of records held by PACRA shows that Tungenu Zambia Construction Limited, one of the subcontracted companies, was incorporated in September 2019 and is listed as inactive. However,

it remains unclear when the company became inactive, whether it was operational at the time the subcontract was awarded, or whether it received any payments under the project.

MakanDay is also investigating allegations that political considerations influenced the selection of both the main contractor and the subcontracted companies.

One ruling party provincial leader denied allegations that the companies had links to the ruling party but questioned how JD Con secured the contract despite allegedly lacking the necessary equipment.

MakanDay contacted JDCON for comment on the allegation, but the company did not respond to follow-up questions.

Who owns JD Con Zambia Limited?

PACRA records show that JDCON Zambia Limited is majority-owned by Mutale Kabuswe, who holds 60% of its listed issued shares.

Sydney Musonda Kalema holds 25%, while Mutale Nsama Kabuswe holds 15%.

The company, incorporated in August 2013, lists Mutale Kabuswe, Mutale Nsama Kabuswe and Moses Makalashi as directors, with Makalashi also serving as company secretary.

Communities affected by delays

Unfinished roadworks have disrupted access to several parts of Solwezi, particularly around Stadium and Kimasala, forcing motorists and residents to use alternative routes.

Solwezi Municipal Council engineer David Pendeke acknowledged the difficulties caused by the delays, although he said completed sections of the roads remained accessible.

"People are cut off. Some have to bypass and go the other way around," he said.

The disruptions have also affected livelihoods, with road users and traders reporting increased transport costs and difficulties accessing some parts of the town.

Kaumba Saviye and Francis Dikashi, a motorist and motorcycle rider respectively, told MakanDay that impassable roads and diversions had disrupted their daily business, forcing transport operators to charge higher fares because of longer alternative routes.

They feared conditions could worsen during the rainy season, particularly in areas with limited alternative access.

Other market traders interviewed by MakanDay reported similar difficulties, saying increased transport costs, dust and flooding had affected their businesses and daily lives.

Who is supervising the works?

Day-to-day technical supervision rests with Iliso Consulting (Zambia) Limited, while Solwezi Municipal Council monitors progress, according to Pendeke.

PACRA records show that Samuel Gong'a and Christopher Mususeni Mumba each hold 50% of the listed issued shares in Iliso Consulting (Zambia) Limited.

The company, incorporated in February 2012, lists Gong'a, Mumba, Hans Weimer Hartung and Lingandran Colin Raman as directors.

Pendeke said Iliso oversees quality control, including laboratory testing of construction materials and completed works, and submits technical progress reports to the council and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.

When MakanDay sought details about construction progress, payment certification and delays, Iliso declined to comment directly, citing restrictions under its consultancy contract.

"Based on our services contract, and as per normal practice, the Consultant doesn't have authority to issue press statements," the company said in an emailed response.

It referred MakanDay to the council and the ministry for further information.

How much work has been completed?,

Besides the 3.3 kilometres of tarred road

MakanDay has also established that approximately 1.726 kilometres of lined drains, six cross culverts, four access culverts, seven access slabs and six pedestrian slabs have been completed by October 2026.

One box culvert had been completed, while another was approximately 80% complete, Pendeke said. Further, MakanDay has not obtained the contract documents or approved variations needed to establish the final scope of the works.

Without verified measurements and certified progress reports, the project's overall physical completion percentage cannot be independently determined.

Questions remain over public spending

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development has yet to respond to questions submitted by MakanDay, including whether the project will be completed by the revised March 2027 deadline.

With the council and contractor presenting conflicting payment figures, questions remain over the funds disbursed, the pace of construction and the government's oversight of the project. For Solwezi residents, the immediate concern is when the unfinished roads will become usable. Whether JDCON can deliver the remaining works by March 2027 remains uncertain, with the revised completion date still awaiting written confirmation from the ministry.

MakanDay contributed to the reporting, editing and fact-checking of this story.



Q&A: Why Zambia was left out of UN findings on Russia’s recruitment networks

Erik Møse, a Norwegian jurist and Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, has extensive experience in international human rights and criminal law.

In this exclusive interview with MakaanDay editor Charles Mafa, Erik Møse, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, explains why Zambia was excluded from the commission’s latest findings on the trafficking of foreign nationals into Russia’s armed forces. He also discusses the role of recruitment agents, Russian authorities, African governments and the fate of Africans captured in Ukraine.

Read the full interview below.

Charles Mafa: Chair Møse, beyond the findings already presented in your latest report, what has your Commission established about the scale and organisation of the recruitment of foreign nationals into Russia’s armed forces, particularly from Africa?

Erik Møse: As you can see in the report, from the 29 countries we have found evidence of trafficking in persons, there are 11 countries from the African continent: Botswana, Cameroun, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Somalia, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Since 2024, there have been clear patterns of recruitment of foreign nationals from particular countries and geographic regions to serve in the Russian armed forces.

Men from the different countries have been deceived and lured to the Russian Federation with false promises of employment. Recruiting agents operating in different geographic regions have advertised fake jobs offering high salaries, have misled recruits as to the true nature of the work, and organised their travel to the Russian Federation. The Commission found similar methods of recruitment in different countries or regions, coordinated actions between recruiting agents and the Russian authorities, and a uniform approach once the recruits reached the Russian Federation. Soon after arrival, the men were forced to sign contracts with the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation to serve in the Russian armed forces.

Charles Mafa: When did your Commission start investigating these crimes?

Erik Møse: We started investigations of that topic earlier this year, 2026, and there is a relatively brief coverage of that in our report from March 2026. But it was the report we submitted to the General Assembly yesterday, the third committee

of the General Assembly, where the issue of the trafficking of foreign nationals was one of our main topics together with another one, namely, Russian authorities’ attacks against Ukraine’s energy-related infrastructure. It follows from our published report that we have found 29 countries where there has been trafficking of persons. And there are 11 countries from Africa listed there.

We can generally say that we have found that since 2024, there have been clear patterns of recruitment of nationals from particular countries and geographic regions to serve in the Russian armed forces. It covers not only Africa but also some other parts of the world.

Charles Mafa: In 2022, for example, a Zambian student who had been imprisoned in Russia, died fighting in Ukraine after being recruited by the Wagner private military group. Did your Commission investigate, examine this case or similar cases involving foreign nationals in those circumstances?

Erik Møse: When it comes to this particular situation, in our report we have not referred to any individual cases.

With respect to Zambia, we have not been able to find evidence to corroborate the incidents brought to our attention, in order to find the necessary threshold to make a finding to include in the report. In connection with this, I want to first talk about the Commission’s findings more in detail.

The report describes how men from different countries have been deceived and lured to the Russian Federation with promises of employment. Recruiting agents operating in different geographic regions have advertised the fake jobs offering high salaries. They have misled recruits as to the true nature of the work.

They have referred to civilian work opportunities

in the Russian Federation and then organised the travel to the Russian Federation. And we’ve seen that in several regions of the world. It was the same approach everywhere, namely that agents persuaded these persons and then assisted with tickets, visa, etc., and then assisted in travelling to the Russian Federation.

Once in the Russian Federation, they are then brought to the Ministry of Defence and are forced to sign contracts with the Ministry of Defence. The contracts are written in Russian so that they do not know what they are signing. And then they are sent to the front line, and many have been killed or wounded.

I would like to explain more about why Zambia is not on the list of countries mentioned in the report. According to our methodology, it is important that we have sufficient evidence which is corroborated, so that we can present it as a conclusion based on the factual investigations we are carrying on. We need a sufficient, solid basis.

That is why, although we have examined 48 countries, we have found enough evidence to make solid conclusions in the case of 29 countries. This does not mean that there was no trafficking in those other countries, including Zambia. It just means that at this stage of our investigations, we did not have enough evidence to make a conclusion.

Charles Mafa: You also mentioned in your report that you did send about 69 letters to countries asking for information about foreign recruitment, but only six countries were able to respond. Was Zambia among those countries that you contacted? And did our government respond?

Erik Møse: You are absolutely right. We did send 69 letters to countries seeking information about this kind of recruitment.

Based on the working methods of the Commission, I’m not in a position to identify which countries responded and which did not. But I think, this is an interesting point you are raising, because the fact that only six out of 69 countries replied underscores the need for greater engagement by states in addressing trafficking. And a stronger engagement by governments in efforts to prevent this and to investigate and to respond to trafficking, by investigating and prosecuting individuals or agents or entities involved in recruitment activities on a state’s territory, is an obligation under international law.

Charles Mafa: Did your work or investigation uncover evidence of African government officials or politicians or any other persons of influence knowingly facilitating these recruitment operations? If so, are you able to mention some of those countries where this is happening?

Erik Møse: We don’t name any particular specificities in connection with countries which are mentioned or listed in our report. We have decided not to mention such persons by name. But of course, information that is relevant can be shared upon request from prosecutorial authorities of a country.

Charles Mafa: So has this information that you gathered been officially communicated to these governments, in particular African governments?

Erik Møse: The system in the Commission is that we assemble evidence and then we publish our report. That is the way it works. And then it will be for judicial bodies of those countries concerned to contact us in case they want more information.

Charles Mafa: What about when it comes to the involvement of Russian diplomatic missions in African countries? Have any links been established that these missions,

Q&A: Why Zambia was left out of UN findings on Russia’s recruitment networks cont...

diplomatic missions in Africa, are facilitating the recruitment operations?

Erik Møse: In our report, we have noted that visas for recruits were issued by Russian embassies in the countries concerned. And often with applications being processed through recruitment agents, the local agents in these countries.

It was not part of our investigation to examine whether Russian diplomatic missions were actively involved in the trafficking process.

Charles Mafa: Is there any evidence that the Commission gathered that links some of the senior Russian military or government officials to these recruitments of foreign nationals?

Erik Møse: We have not identified any specific Russian military or government officials in the activities, naming individuals, etc. But we have noted that similar recruitment methods were used across different countries and regions, and there was coordinated interaction between recruitment agents and Russian authorities.

It was a consistent pattern of treatment, once the recruits arrived in the Russian Federation, together with the coordination between recruitment agents and Russian authorities, that point to a degree of involvement by Russian state authorities in the recruitment process.

Charles Mafa: Has the Commission, at this stage and from your findings, identified whether any of the African nationals are currently being held as prisoners of war in Ukraine? And if so, are there efforts to facilitate their repatriation?

Erik Møse: The Commission has interviewed a number of African nationals who are currently held as prisoners of war in Ukraine. Any measures taken with respect to these individuals must, of course, be carried out in contact between the state of origin and Ukraine and in accordance with the Third Geneva Convention.

Charles Mafa: Is this recruitment just happening on the Russian side or Ukraine as well has been recruiting? Are there any traces or evidence that you could say, even because this war involves two countries?

Erik Møse: We have not found any evidence of this kind of recruitment on the Ukrainian side. The Commission has interviewed people who were fighting for Ukraine, but that was not as a consequence of being lured into the Ukrainian armed forces. It was voluntary, and they were paid for their activities as armed soldiers in the conflict.

Charles Mafa: Is there a link with economies of the states where these countries, these men and women are coming from?

Erik Møse: Our report shows that many of those who decided to be enlisted in, for instance, African countries or in other parts of the world and then left for Russia, thinking they are going for civilian jobs, did not know that they would end up in the Russian armed forces fighting in Ukraine. We all know that there are mercenaries around the world, people wishing to join conflicts because of their knowledge about how to handle weapons or for other reasons such as economic considerations.

There can be many reasons, but that is a different situation. Our report investigated only the cases of recruitment through deception and coercion, with victims thinking they are going for a civilian work and ending up at the battlefield.

Charles Mafa: I know you did mention earlier in our discussion that it is not in the interest of the Commission to individually engage the African government. Is it the same also with, for example, the African Union, to share these findings and to see whether this is something that they need to start talking about at that level?

Erik Møse: We are willing to share that information. The entire purpose of our activity as a commission of inquiry is to assist states with ensuring accountability.

According to the UN established practice for investigative bodies, the Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine shares information about perpetrators with judicial authorities at the national or international level. Such information can be made available to relevant judicial authorities upon request.

Møse, a Norwegian jurist and Chair of the Independent

International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, has extensive experience in international human rights and criminal law. He previously served as President of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, a judge of the European Court of Human Rights

Fake jobs, forced contracts and deaths

UN reveals how Russia recruited Africans for Ukraine war

By Charles Mafa

Investigation uncovers coordinated recruitment networks spanning 29 countries, as findings raise fresh questions over the fate of Zambians drawn into Russia's war.

A United Nations investigation has concluded that Russian authorities worked with recruitment agents across the world to traffic foreign nationals, including Africans, into fighting in Ukraine by luring them with false job offers before forcing them to sign military contracts.

The findings, contained in a report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine dated 19 October 2026, reveal a coordinated recruitment operation involving agents who promised lucrative civilian employment in Russia, arranged travel documents and transported unsuspecting recruits into the hands of the Russian military.

The Commission investigated recruitment involving nationals from 48 countries and found evidence of deception or coercion involving people from 29 countries, including Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

The findings add a significant international dimension to investigations by MakaanDay into the recruitment of Zambians for Russia's war against Ukraine, including the case of a Zambian student who died after joining the Wagner private military group.

Although Zambia is not among the 29 countries specifically identified in the latest UN findings, the report says investigators also examined credible allegations of similar recruitment from other countries.

The Commission concluded that Russian authorities,

and a judge of Norway’s Supreme Court.

He also chaired the Council of Europe’s Steering Committee for Human Rights and the expert committee responsible for drafting the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture.

working with recruitment agents, had committed trafficking in persons and other human rights violations.

Promised jobs, sent to war

According to the report, men from economically vulnerable communities were approached by recruitment agents offering employment as security guards, drivers, mechanics, electricians, welders, construction workers and technicians.

Some were promised high salaries, accommodation, Russian citizenship and pensions.

The offers appeared genuine, with recruitment agencies sometimes producing official-looking documentation, employment guarantees and travel arrangements.

But the recruits discovered a different reality when they arrived in Russia.

Instead of being taken to civilian workplaces, they were transported to accommodation controlled by recruitment agents and subsequently handed over to the Russian military.

They were then compelled to sign contracts with Russia's Ministry of Defence, often without understanding their contents.

The contracts were written in Russian, a language most of the recruits could neither read nor speak.

One recruit told UN investigators: “They just asked me to sign, the whole document was in Russian, I could not even read my own name. I only understood it was for one year”.

The report says passports, driving licences and mobile phones were frequently confiscated, preventing recruits from communicating

Fake jobs, forced contracts and deaths cont...

freely or translating documents.

Some were threatened with violence when they resisted.

One man described what happened when he refused to sign a military contract: “They took me 100 metres away, shot four Russians in my presence, and told me if you don’t sign, you are the next”. He subsequently signed the contract.

The Commission found that recruitment agents operating in different countries followed strikingly similar procedures, suggesting a high degree of coordination with Russian authorities.

A deadly recruitment operation

The UN investigation documents the devastating consequences of the recruitment networks.

In one case, a group of 30 men received employment guarantees from a civilian company in Russia.

The documentation explicitly promised that the recruits would not be deployed to fight in Ukraine.

Yet, according to the Commission, 17 of the men subsequently died on the front lines, five remained missing and only one was reported to have returned after sustaining injuries. The report does not identify the nationality of this particular group.

Other recruits described receiving only minimal military training, sometimes lasting just 20 minutes, before being deployed into combat.

They were assigned dangerous tasks, including advancing on Ukrainian positions, digging trenches and recovering bodies and body parts from battlefields.

The Commission also documented allegations that commanders beat and threatened recruits, while drones monitored their movements to prevent them from retreating.

Some men went missing shortly after deployment, leaving their families desperately searching for information.

The wife of one recruit described how her husband was pressured into signing a contract: “They took his passport and just told him to sign here, here and here on the contract. It was only in Russian.

He was totally pressured and had no choice.”

Echoes of MakaanDay's Zambian investigations

The UN findings come against the background of MakaanDay's reporting on the involvement of Zambians in Russia's war against Ukraine.

In 2022, MakaanDay reported on the case of a Zambian student who died in Ukraine after being recruited by Russia's Wagner private military group.

The case drew attention to how a young Zambian who had travelled to Russia for education ended up fighting in a foreign war.

MakaanDay has subsequently investigated Russia-linked recruitment activities, including the Alabuga project, raising broader questions about employment opportunities advertised to Africans and the circumstances under which they are recruited.

The latest UN report identifies two principal methods through which foreign nationals were drawn into Russian military service.

The first involved people recruited from their home countries through misleading promises of civilian employment.

The second involved foreigners already living in Russia who were pressured or deceived into joining the armed forces.

The Commission documented cases in which foreign nationals held in Russian detention facilities or prisons were offered military contracts, sometimes under threats of prolonged imprisonment or mistreatment.

It found that people already in Russia could be particularly vulnerable to coercion.

These findings provide a wider framework for examining the circumstances under which Zambians have become involved in the conflict, although the Commission does not specifically assess the Zambian cases previously reported by MakaanDay.

Families left searching for answers

The UN report describes the anguish of families whose relatives disappeared after travelling to Russia.

Some only discovered that their loved ones had been killed through social media, news reports or messages from fellow recruits.

Others were unable to establish whether their relatives were alive, injured, captured or dead.

The Commission found that families frequently struggled to obtain assistance from authorities in their home countries or from diplomatic missions.

Recruitment agents sometimes stopped answering calls or blocked relatives attempting to establish the whereabouts of missing men.

In some cases, families were unable to recover the remains of relatives who had died in combat.

“It is so hard, explaining to a child that your dad is gone, when they don’t even see his body and bury him – they will never believe he is dead if they don’t bury him,” One woman told investigators.

The Commission also documented financial losses among families who had borrowed money to pay recruitment agents.

Some recruits were charged between US\$400 and US\$8,000 for travel and recruitment arrangements.

Others complained that promised salaries were withheld, bank accounts were blocked or money was withdrawn without their permission.

UN rejects classification of trafficked recruits as mercenaries

In a potentially significant finding for countries whose citizens have been recruited into the conflict, the Commission concluded that foreign nationals trafficked into the Russian armed forces should not be treated as mercenaries merely because they subsequently served in the military.

The report says that once recruited into Russia's armed forces, these individuals became members of the military and acquired combatant status.

Those captured or surrendering to Ukrainian forces are therefore entitled to protection under the Third Geneva Convention governing prisoners of war.

The Commission urged countries whose nationals had been trafficked not to prosecute them for military

service resulting from trafficking.

It also called on governments to investigate recruitment networks, cooperate internationally to secure the release of victims and assist families seeking information about missing relatives.

The findings could have implications for African governments seeking to determine whether citizens who joined Russian forces did so voluntarily or were deceived into military service.

Russia denies illegal recruitment

The report says Russian officials have repeatedly denied allegations of illegal recruitment.

The Commission, however, found evidence of coordination between recruitment agents and Russian authorities, including the processing of travel documents, the use of similar recruitment methods across countries and the signing of standardised contracts with Russia's Ministry of Defence.

Its findings were based on 245 testimonies from recruits, family members and other sources, alongside documents including visas, flight tickets, employment invitations and Russian military contracts.

The Commission said it sent 69 letters to countries seeking information about recruitment and received only six responses.

Russia has also declined to recognise the Commission, leaving 41 requests for access, information and meetings unanswered.

The report calls on Russia to immediately end deceptive and coercive recruitment, discharge foreign nationals who are victims of trafficking and cooperate with other governments to address the cases of those killed, injured or missing.

For Zambia, the findings renew questions about the recruitment of its citizens into Russia's war, the safeguards available to Zambians seeking opportunities abroad and the assistance provided to families when their relatives become caught up in a foreign conflict.



EDITORIAL

Two Contrasting Scenes, One Question About Zambia’s Priorities

Two contrasting scenes this week tell a troubling story about Zambia's development priorities, coming just days after the country celebrated its 62nd independence anniversary.

Sixty-two years after independence, the promise of a better life remains unfulfilled for many Zambians. The contrast between what is happening in a rural classroom and what is unfolding in the corridors of power in Lusaka could hardly be more striking.

The first scene is of children learning in dusty classrooms made of poles and mud, without proper desks or the basic facilities that should be available in any school. The second is from Lusaka, where President Hakainde Hichilema unveiled an expanded Cabinet, appointing more ministers to address the country's development challenges.

These two scenes may appear unrelated, but they raise an important question: Are we putting our limited national resources where they are needed most?

At Makombo Community School in the Lukanga North Resettlement Scheme in Mpongwe district on the Copperbelt, more than 200 children attend classes in structures that barely resemble classrooms. The walls are made of mud, the roof is supported by wooden poles, and the floor is bare earth. Instead of desks, pupils have to make do with makeshift seating fashioned from blocks and logs.

The school was established by the community itself, after residents recognised the need for their children to have access to education. Rather than wait for the government to build a school, they took matters into their own hands, putting up the modest structures in which their children now learn.

This year, Makombo was gazetted

as a government school, a development that should have brought renewed hope to the community. Official recognition is an important step, but it means little to a child who must continue learning in such conditions.

What makes the situation even more troubling is that Makombo is not in some remote, inaccessible corner of Zambia. The school is about a 45-minute drive from Mpongwe town.

Yet, despite being relatively close to the district's main commercial centre, its pupils continue to learn in conditions that raise uncomfortable questions about how far development has reached, even 62 years after independence.

These children are no less deserving of a decent education than those attending well-equipped schools in Lusaka or other urban centres. They, too, have dreams of becoming doctors, teachers, engineers, journalists and leaders. Yet the environment in which they are expected to learn places them at a disadvantage from the very beginning.

Imagine being a child who walks to school every morning, eager to learn, only to spend the day sitting on a makeshift seat in a dusty classroom without a proper desk. This is the reality for more than 200 children at Makambo Community School. Their teachers face an equally difficult task: trying to give these children a decent education without the most basic facilities.

The assignment of two teachers to the school earlier this year is a welcome step, but two teachers alone cannot meet the needs of more than 200 pupils. These children deserve more than a place to sit and listen to lessons. They deserve proper classrooms, desks, learning materials and enough teachers to give them a fair chance at a better future.

Meanwhile, in Lusaka, the political establishment continues to grow. We are at pains to understand how increasing the number of Members of Parliament and Cabinet ministers will, by itself, translate into better living conditions for ordinary Zambians.

The argument may be that a larger parliament improves representation and that additional ministers strengthen the government's capacity to deliver services. These are arguments worth considering. But representation must be measured by what it delivers to citizens, not simply by the number of people occupying public office.

Every additional political office comes with a cost. There are salaries, allowances, vehicles, offices, administrative staff and other expenses that must be met from public resources.

These are resources drawn from the same national purse expected to finance classrooms, recruit teachers, equip hospitals, maintain roads and provide clean drinking water.

We are not suggesting that the country should have no ministers or that parliamentary representation is unnecessary. Government must function, and citizens deserve effective representation. But there must be a reasonable balance between the cost of governing and the resources available to meet people's most pressing needs.

For a child at Makombo Community School, development is not measured by how many ministers are appointed or how many MPs sit in the national assembly. Development means having a proper classroom, a desk, textbooks and a qualified teacher.

For parents in Lukanga North, it means knowing that their children have a fair chance of succeeding in life, regardless of where they were born. This is where our national debate about development must begin.

Too often, political decisions are celebrated in Lusaka without sufficient

consideration of their consequences for communities far removed from the corridors of power. We discuss government appointments, political representation and administrative structures while children continue learning in conditions that should have no place in a country endowed with so much mineral wealth.

The irony is particularly striking in the Copperbelt, a province whose mineral resources have contributed enormously to Zambia's economy for generations. Yet some communities still struggle to provide their children with the most basic educational infrastructure.

Makombo Community School is a reminder that the benefits of national development remain unevenly distributed.

The government deserves credit when it expands access to education and brings community schools into the public education system. But gazetting a school must be followed by meaningful investment.

Recognition should be the beginning of improvement, not the end of government's responsibility.

There must be a clear plan to provide permanent classrooms, desks, teaching materials and adequate staffing. Without these, the promise of education risks becoming little more than an administrative achievement.

And this raises another question: where is the much-talked-about Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in all this? Why has it not been used to build decent classrooms for the children of Makombo Community School? Has the school been considered for CDF support, and if not, why not?

These are questions that political leaders in Lambaland must answer. After all, what is the purpose of increasing development funds to constituencies if children in communities such as Lukanga North must still sit in dusty, mud-walled classrooms to receive an education? The children of Makombo Community School cannot wait indefinitely for development to reach them.

EDITORIAL

Two Contrasting Scenes, One Question About Zambia’s Priorities

Every year spent learning under such conditions is a year of their childhood that cannot be recovered.

As the government settles into its expanded political structures, we hope those entrusted with public office will remember the children sitting in dusty classrooms in Mpongwe and countless other communities across Zambia.

The true measure of a government's commitment to development is not the size of its Cabinet or Parliament, but the difference it makes in the everyday lives of its citizens.

And perhaps the most important question we should be asking is this: If Zambia can find the resources to expand its political establishment, why should more than 200 children at Makombo Community School still have to learn in a mud classroom?





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YOUR SAY

Your opinion. Your argument. Your space.



A space for our readers to share their views, challenge ideas and contribute to conversations about the issues shaping Zambia and our communities. Opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of MakanDay.

- “Bantangi kafwako yaya” (We don’t have leaders). — Lillian Nkwashi, reacting to our story on an incomplete project.
- “People will follow rules when they see that breaking them isn’t worth it.” — Mark Hemsworth, reacting to our editorial, It Seems Disorder Is Our Way of Life.
- “Inclusive education is not even at 60%. Children with special needs, especially those who are visually impaired, are suffering in schools. Dr Mwamba has spoken well, but the system has failed us.” — Lily Guchamp, reacting to our story on inclusive education.

Entries Open for the MakanDay Investigative Reporting Award

Now in its fifth year, the Eminent Prize for Investigative Journalism celebrates Zambian journalists whose reporting goes beyond the headlines to expose corruption, abuse of power and injustice.

Entries close: 31 October 2026

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

What’s at stake?

Overall Winner: A brand-new laptop
Runner-up: A fully paid internship at MakanDay
Honourable Mentions: Up to two outstanding entries may receive special recognition, with the journalists invited to MakanDay’s awards ceremony.

Winning and finalist investigations will also be showcased on the MakanDay website and across our social media platforms, giving exceptional investigative journalism greater visibility.

Who can enter?

The award is open to journalists based in Zambia, including MakanDay contributors. However, journalists employed by MakanDay are not eligible to enter.

Entries should demonstrate strong investigative reporting by uncovering information of significant public interest, particularly reporting that exposes corruption, abuse of power, wrongdoing or injustice.

Journalists may submit their own work or nominate another journalist’s work with their permission.

Submission Guidelines

Eligible work must have been published or broadcast between 1 December 2025 and 31 October 2026.

Entries published or broadcast in languages other than English must be accompanied by an English translation.

For print or written entries, submit a scanned or digital copy. Where the text is difficult to read, include a transcript in Word or PDF format.

For radio, television or online video entries, provide a working link or attach the relevant audio or video file.

Every submission must include a short biography and photograph of the entrant or entrants.

Ready to enter?

Send your submission to editor@makanday.org by 31 October 2026.

Visit the MakanDay website for more information. Great investigations deserve to be recognised. If your journalism uncovered what others wanted hidden, we want to see it.



Cabinet Is Almost Complete. What Will Ministers Do in Parliament?

With only two ministerial positions awaiting appointments, MakanDay explains why ministers must answer to parliament and how the Vice-President helped secure approval for President Hakainde Hichilema's expanded government.

By MakanDay Editor

President Hakainde Hichilema has appointed 28 Cabinet ministers, leaving the ministries of Housing and Transport and Logistics without substantive ministers.

The appointments follow parliament’s approval of the President's decision to increase the number of government ministries from 24 to 30, an increase by six.

But beyond running their ministries, what responsibilities do these ministers have in the national assembly?

Ministers must answer to parliament

A minister is not only responsible for overseeing a government ministry. As a member of parliament, a minister must also account for government decisions and policies in the house.

For example, when a hospital runs out of essential medicines, MPs can question the Minister of Health about the shortages and what the government is doing to address them.

Similarly, the Minister of Agriculture may be asked about delayed farming inputs, while the Minister of Electricity may face questions about power shortages.

However, although ministers remain MPs, their role changes once they are appointed to Cabinet. They cease asking parliamentary questions as backbench MPs do

and instead become responsible for answering questions from other MPs and explaining government decisions.

Under the Standing Orders, ministers respond to parliamentary questions, present statements on matters within their portfolios and introduce government bills.

A minister may request permission from the Speaker to deliver a ministerial statement. The Speaker may also direct a minister to address the House on a matter of public interest.

Following such a statement, MPs can seek clarification, although they cannot debate the statement itself.

This process gives MPs an opportunity to demand explanations on behalf of the people they represent.

What is the Vice-President's role?

Before President Hichilema appointed most of his Cabinet, Vice-President Mutale Nalumango played a central role in securing parliamentary approval for the restructuring of government ministries.

On 27 October, she moved the motion seeking approval to establish, merge and dissolve ministries, paving the way for the expansion to 30.

The Vice-President has a special parliamentary responsibility

as Leader of Government Business in the House.

According to the Standing Orders, this involves defending government policies, coordinating ministerial responses to parliamentary questions and ensuring that government bills and other business are brought before the national assembly.

The Vice-President also answers questions without prior notice during Vice-President's Question Time.

Importantly, the Standing Orders describe the Vice-President as the minister of last resort, providing a point of accountability where responsibility for a government matter is not otherwise clear.

Why should this matter to you?

With the new Cabinet taking shape, ministers will be expected to explain their policies, spending decisions and progress in delivering public services.

Parliament's approval of additional ministries also raises questions about their cost, staffing and whether the changes will improve services.

These are matters MPs can pursue through questions, debates and committee scrutiny.

For ordinary Zambians, the test is not simply who has been appointed to Cabinet, but whether ministers provide answers and whether government decisions translate into better services.

A minister's responsibility does not end with an appointment at State House. It extends to the national assembly, where government must account for its decisions.



From the Bulletin & Record Archives

The Tonga music festival: promoting a sense of belonging and cultural identity

First published in the October 2014 edition of Bulletin & Record, this story takes us back to Chikuni, Southern Province, where music, dance and poetry brought generations together. Twelve years later, its message about preserving cultural identity and passing traditions on to younger generations remains just as relevant.

Charles Mafa attended the 2014 Tonga Musical Festival and discovered how music, dance and poetry were keeping Tonga cultural traditions alive.

Not even persistent wind on the first day could stop the crowd of Tonga patriots from gathering to take part in a two-day annual musical festival at Chikuni, a place sometimes referred to as “little Bethlehem”.

Chikuni is known by this name because in 1905 it gave birth to the first Jesuit Catholic Mission in Zambia, just like Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ. Even now Chikuni, which is south-east of Monze, maintains its significance as a centre of Catholic faith, education and a hub of cultural renaissance.

It is Friday, the first day of the musical festival. Individuals from the Tonga ethnic group and others gather beneath the grey skies to partake in the music and dance that define the Tongas as a people. One by one, individuals and groups take to the podium to participate. When it is time for veteran musician Patrick Haampongo to perform with his kalumbu, a traditional musical instrument made of a stick attached to a calabash, he plays it with great energy, interspacing its sound with his voice.

The kalumbu is not just played for fun. In the past, it was played by a young man who wanted to get married. As Jyde Hamoonga, one of the event’s organisers, explains: “When a young man is about to get married, he has to play kalumbu the whole night and the parents will ask him the following morning: ‘Have you seen someone?’ If he says no, then they will take it upon themselves to find someone for him.”

Later, a group of women play what is known as bukonkoolo. Seated in a semi-circle, they beat two pounding sticks. This kind of music is usually played indoors during funerals to comfort the widow.

During a time of mourning, men tend to use poetry.

They will not wail like women but would rather play the namalwa – the poetry drum. They will lament the loss of a loved one as the poetry is performed.

Even the dress for each performance is different. The girls, for example, are wearing necklaces made of beads around their necks and on top of their vests as they perform ciyayaale. This tune is normally sung in the morning by girls who are in seclusion practicing for Nkolola, an initiation ceremony. The dance performed by girls who have come of age involves moving the legs as a way of flexing the muscles.

Music and poetry very much form part of the Tonga tradition. Through this annual music festival, the Tonga people are exploring the traditions of their past and reconnecting them with the present. Amidst shouts of nkosadi, meaning concert, several hundred guests dance and jiggle, their voices blending and their sentiments united. The event, now in its fourteenth year, demonstrating the spirit of harmony and joyfulness of those who call this land home.

“This is the combination of poetry and traditional music. It speaks of the Tonga people’s livelihood from birth to death. You have got songs, tradition and culture that are used at specific times,” Mr Hamoonga says.

The Tonga Musical Festival, one of the country’s largest cultural events, is the brainchild of Chikuni Radio. Its main aim is to promote a sense of belonging and cultural identity among the Tonga-speaking people. The festival facilitates the passing down of traditions by the older generation to the young ones. The family-oriented event is a delightful coming together of all ages of Tonga people, attracting people from far and wide.

Michael Baird, a British national who was born in Zambia, has travelled all the way from the Netherlands where he lives to come and witness the event. As a musician, drummer and composer, he loves what he is seeing and hearing. He is also worried that “traditions in most developing countries are disappearing” and “we’re headed towards a mono-culture”.

“They [the West] want all of us to eat McDonalds, all of us to drink Coca Cola and it is terrible because cultural diversity is so important on this earth,” Mr Baird explains. “There is so much fantastic music here, roots music. All the muzungus [whites] in the West and in the east, they’re very interested in this. At world music festivals in Europe, they’re always looking for something new and the old music is disappearing so fast. It’s a tragedy!”

Fr Costa Cheepa, a priest and former chairperson of the Inculturation Commission for Monze Diocese, explains that although the Tonga Musical Festival honours tradition, it is not in a rigid manner. Its intention is to allow people to connect with their culture and Christianity in a modern way, so that they can be both proudly Tonga and citizens of the global village.

“There should be dialogue between faith and culture. This should be equal,” Fr Cheepa says.

“The church has something to offer and tradition has something to offer. The church is found everywhere, so if we promoted such values, such customs, they would have not died.”

The 2014 theme is Cakaanza bimbe sikakonzemunaanizigwa (a bird that can’t swoop for fish can learn from the skilled ones), reflecting not only the importance of learning

from the old but promoting and preserving cultural identity and heritage.

Aptly so, the Catholic Church in this part of the country is not only involved in promoting cultural identity but preserving it as well. In the 1960s, the idea to set up the Mukanzubo Cultural Research Institute was mooted and today it is at the centre of cultural preservation.

“A house without a proper foundation will always collapse,” says 56-year-old Yvonne Ndaba of Mukanzubo. “Through Icizyano ca mutonga (the Tonga dance), we’re teaching young girls to overcome challenges of life. We also do initiation for girls who have come of age.”

At the musical festival, Ms Ndaba and her team from Mukanzubo are busy. “We’re the torch of the modern world because young people have forgotten their own culture. To those who’re watching our performances, they will benefit through the music because it comes with assorted messages.”

But what does the younger generation have to say about this?

A collection of young women and men attending the event told the B&R that they are there because they believe it is important to embrace and celebrate their culture. They said they wanted to find their own way of honouring tradition and, at the same time, entertain current cultural trends.

One participant from Lusaka said this was one of only a handful of occasions where she could enjoy and express her culture.

In recent years, the event has run from Friday to Saturday, with both days reserved for competition, while more experienced bands come in to entertain the people.

From the Bulletin & Record Archives

The Tonga music festival: promoting a sense of belonging and cultural identity cont..

“We have 85 bands that are competing and 25 bands that are showcasing different but traditional Tonga music,” says Mr Hamoonga, who is also Chikuni Radio’s programmes manager. Musical groups such as Green Mamba, Masaka and the Cibweze Bands, who have competed in the past and since established themselves as successful musical outfits, are here to entertain the revellers.

“A lot of the traditional music was really dying, so for Chikuni, being a community radio, it was decided that we will be playing 90% traditional or local music. So, alongside that, every Saturday, traditional music is recorded at the radio for airplay. Then it culminates into the music festival which we host every year.”

Many at this year’s event have enjoyed the unique performances and creativity of the local musicians.

Mr Baird, who has also been recording some of the Tonga traditional songs, says: “For the first time in my life, I heard mantimbwa. This is an instrument I have never heard in my life. This old lady is playing a bucket with the bowl and she uses her chin. She gets three notes out of plucking the string. Eeeh, what is this? It is pure African musical genius. It is Zambian genius. Don’t let it disappear. All these are important for the future of the nation because it is identity and you need your own identity.”

After all the exertion of singing, dancing and fun, the event comes to an end. It is estimated that over 10,000 people attended this year – the highest head count at the festival so far. If you are a music cultural enthusiast, next year’s Tonga Musical Festival is not to be missed.

