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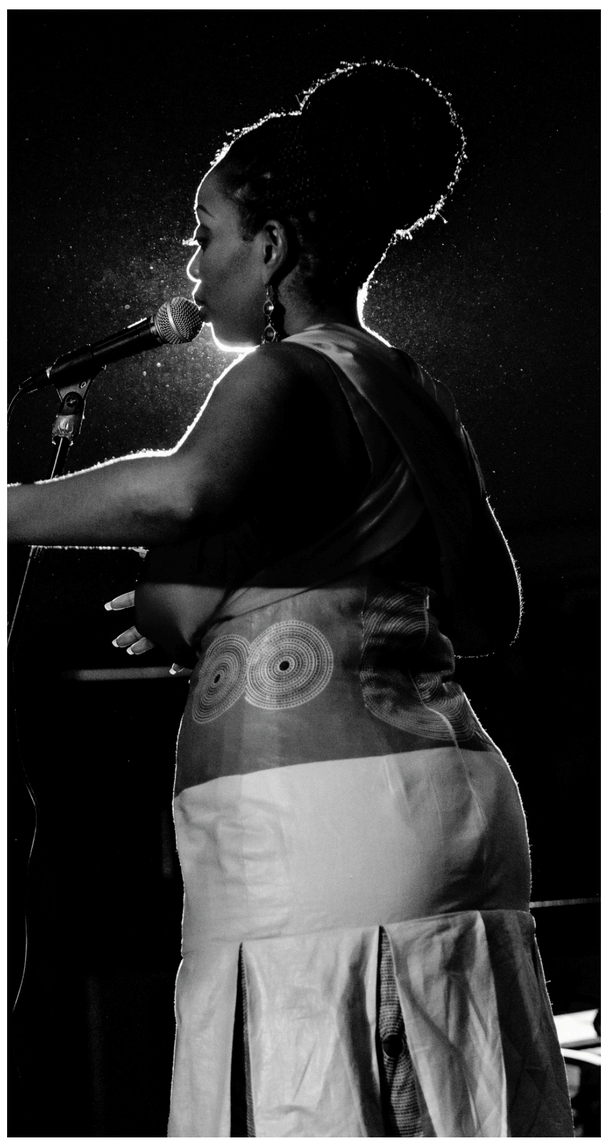


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EU Report Flags Alleged Bribery of Candidates as CCMG Questions Uncontested Elections

By Ennety Munshya

From page 1

Some candidates in Zambia's August 13 general elections allegedly received bribes to withdraw from electoral contests, while others reported intimidation and obstruction during nominations, according to the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM).

The allegations have taken on renewed significance following the withdrawal of competing candidates from parliamentary contests in Mandevu and Lumezi North constituencies, leaving voters without an opportunity to choose between candidates at the ballot box.

In a statement issued on November 4, 2026, the Christian Churches Monitoring Group (CCMG) warned that the growing number of uncontested parliamentary elections threatens meaningful political competition and risks weakening Zambia's multiparty democracy.

CCMG expressed concern over the withdrawal of competing candidates, noting that although electoral laws permit a candidate to be declared elected where only one validly nominated candidate remains, repeated uncontested elections raise questions about citizens' right to choose their representatives.

In Lumezi North Constituency in Eastern Province, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) declared the ruling United Party for National Development (UPND) candidate elected after other candidates withdrew from the race.

Similarly, a parliamentary by-election scheduled for November 5, 2026, in Mandevu Constituency in Lusaka will not proceed after all three competing candidates withdrew, leaving the UPND candidate as the only validly nominated contestant.

CCMG acknowledged that candidates may withdraw from elections for personal, political or institutional reasons, but warned that withdrawals occurring under questionable circumstances could undermine the credibility of democratic competition.

"CCMG is concerned by allegations that some candidates in Mandevu experienced persistent harassment, intimidation and pressure prior to their withdrawal. These allegations, which have been publicly raised by political actors, require impartial investigation by the relevant authorities to establish the facts and ensure accountability where wrongdoing is found," the organisation said in a statement issued by its Programme Director, Peter Mwanangombe.

The concerns come just a day after the release of the EU EOM's final report on Zambia's August 13 general elections.

The report documented allegations that some candidates had been bribed to withdraw, intimidated or prevented from reaching nomination centres.

Other candidates reported that police detention had been used to prevent them from filing their nominations.

The mission also described candidate adoption and nomination processes as chaotic in some instances, citing opaque party selection procedures and internal political disputes.

Although these allegations were reported to EU observers, the report does not establish that every alleged incident occurred or that the recent withdrawals in Mandevu involved bribery.

The EU further identified uncertainty surrounding candidate withdrawals as one of the shortcomings in the ECZ's administration of the electoral process.

More broadly, the mission found that fundamental democratic rights, particularly freedoms of assembly and expression, were restricted during the elections.

It also reported that the misuse of state resources, police bias and unequal campaign conditions disadvantaged some political contestants.

The findings reinforce longstanding concerns about the fairness of political competition in Zambia, where successive EU election observation missions have repeatedly recommended reforms to guarantee equal campaign opportunities.

CCMG has now called on government and state institutions to strengthen safeguards against intimidation, harassment and undue interference in electoral contests.

It has also urged the Zambia Police Service to investigate allegations of political intimidation, violence and obstruction of electoral participation impartially.

The organisation further called on the ECZ to review the legal and administrative framework governing candidate withdrawals after nominations to ensure that such decisions are genuinely voluntary and free from coercion.

CCMG said political competition should be based on ideas, policies and public support rather than fear, intimidation or restrictions on political participation.

"The strength of democracy is measured not only by whether elections are held, but by whether citizens have meaningful choices and whether political competition takes place in an environment where all participants can engage freely and safely," the organisation said.

- **Peter Mwanangombe**



Different Governments, Same Electoral Problems: 25 Years of EU Warnings to Zambia

Successive governments have failed to address longstanding electoral weaknesses, with a new European Union report revealing that only one of 22 recommendations made after the 2021 elections had been fully implemented ahead of the August 2026 polls.

By MakanDay Editor

For at least 25 years, European Union election observers have repeatedly warned Zambia about the misuse of state resources, political interference in public media, unequal campaign conditions and the lack of transparency in political party financing. More recently, the spread of disinformation on social media has emerged as another concern, raising questions about the integrity of political debate and voters' access to reliable information.

Yet, despite successive changes of government and three different political parties holding power during this period, many of the same concerns continue to appear in election observation reports, raising questions about successive administrations' commitment to meaningful electoral reforms.

An analysis by MakanDay of four EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) final reports covering the 2011, 2016, 2021 and 2026 general elections reveals that recommendations intended to strengthen Zambia's democracy have repeatedly gone unimplemented.
The findings cut across three governing parties: the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD), Patriotic Front (PF) and United Party for National Development (UPND).

The latest EU report, released on 3 November 2026, provides particularly revealing evidence of the limited progress.
Of the 22 recommendations made following the 2021 elections won by the UPND, only one had been fully implemented by 2026, while four were partially implemented.

The report also found that several longstanding recommendations, including laws regulating political party financing and measures to ensure equal campaign opportunities, remained outstanding.

The same problems, different governments

In 2011, when the MMD governed Zambia under President Rupiah Banda, EU observers reported that the use of state resources and the overlap between official presidential duties and election campaigning created an uneven playing field.

The mission also found that state-owned television and radio stations unduly favoured the ruling MMD, limiting voters' access to balanced political information.

Five years later, under President Edgar Lungu's PF administration, the EU again documented systematic bias in state media, restrictions on opposition campaigning and concerns about the use of state resources.

The 2016 mission issued 33 recommendations intended to address weaknesses in the electoral process.

However, when EU observers returned for the 2021 elections, they found that only seven of those recommendations had been fully or partially implemented.

The 2021 report again identified the selective application of the Public Order Act, the misuse of state resources and the lack of legislation regulating political party financing.

Following the UPND's victory in 2021, expectations of electoral reforms were renewed.
But the EU's assessment of the August 2026 elections indicates that several of the same problems persisted under President Hakainde Hichilema's administration.

The mission reported that the campaign was characterised by police bias, restrictions on opposition activities and the misuse of state resources, which contributed to unequal conditions for political contestants.

It also raised concerns about the Electoral Commission of Zambia's decision to introduce a presidential campaign calendar that restricted opposition candidates but exempted the incumbent president and vice-president.

State media: the ruling party's advantage
One of the clearest patterns across the four reports is the failure of successive governments to ensure balanced election coverage by state-owned media.

In 2011, the EU found that state broadcasters favoured the MMD.

In 2016 and 2021, the same concern emerged under the PF.

In 2026, EU media monitoring found that the ruling UPND received 96.2% of monitored political airtime on ZNBC television and 90.5% on ZNBC radio.

The figures suggest that changes in political leadership have not fundamentally altered the relationship between the governing party and the public broadcaster.

For voters, the consequences are significant, election observers say. A public broadcaster that overwhelmingly favours one political party limits opportunities for citizens to hear competing political views and make informed choices.

The EU has repeatedly recommended transforming ZNBC into a genuine public service broadcaster with editorial independence from government. That recommendation remains outstanding.

Disinformation: A growing threat to electoral integrity
Beyond the longstanding problem of political bias in state-owned media, the EU's 2026 Election Observation Mission identified the spread of false information and attempts to discredit political opponents on social media as additional concerns affecting Zambia's electoral environment.

The report found that social media platforms had become important campaign tools, allowing candidates to reach voters directly, particularly those without the financial resources to organise large rallies or pay for broadcast advertising.

However, these platforms also provided opportunities for the circulation of false claims and misleading political narratives.

Although EU observers documented numerous false claims during the campaign, they found no evidence of a coordinated and structured disinformation effort.

The mission also reported that inflammatory ethnic and violent language was relatively limited during the campaign but increased immediately after the elections.

At the same time, the EU raised concerns that restrictive cyber laws were contributing to self-censorship, potentially discouraging citizens from participating freely in political discussions online.

The report acknowledged the work of the **iVerify fact-checking platform**, describing its efforts to debunk false claims as consistent and professional. It further recommended that responsibility for identifying speech-related offences and countering disinformation should rest outside the security sector.

The findings point to an emerging challenge for Zambia's democracy: protecting voters from misleading political information while ensuring that measures intended to combat disinformation do not become instruments for restricting legitimate criticism and freedom of expression.

Who pays for political campaigns?

Another unresolved issue is the absence of comprehensive legislation regulating political party and campaign financing.

As far back as 2011, the EU recommended laws requiring greater transparency in political donations and campaign expenditure. The issue resurfaced in the 2016 and 2021 reports.

In 2026, the EU again found that constitutionally mandated legislation on political parties and political financing had not been enacted.

Without effective disclosure and independent oversight, voters have limited information about who finances political campaigns, how much parties spend

Different Governments, Same Electoral Problems: 25 Years of EU Warnings to Zambia cont...

and whether public resources are being diverted for partisan purposes. The absence of such regulation also disadvantages smaller political parties and candidates who lack access to substantial financial resources.

The cost of ignoring recommendations

The EU's latest findings raise questions about what happens to election observation recommendations once international observers leave Zambia.

Following the 2016 elections, the EU made 33 recommendations. By 2021, only seven had been fully or partially implemented.

After the 2021 elections, the mission issued another 22 recommendations, including six priorities.

By the time Zambians voted in August 2026, only one recommendation had been fully implemented. The Access to Information Act has been enacted.

The EU acknowledged other reforms, including the repeal of criminal defamation of the president in 2022. However, it warned that the benefits of some changes had been limited by other restrictive legislation and practices.

In its 2026 report, the mission noted that earlier EU election observation reports dating back to 2001 had repeatedly recommended reforms addressing unequal campaign conditions, the Public Order Act, political financing, state media independence and women's political participation.

The findings reinforce questions raised in MakanDay's earlier investigation, Elections Circus, published in May 2026 as part of a collaborative investigation into European funding for elections in five African countries.

That investigation questioned the effectiveness of international electoral assistance where longstanding recommendations remain unimplemented.

It reported that substantial election-support funding had been directed towards state institutions, including training and other programmes, while grassroots pro-democracy organisations received comparatively limited support.

The latest EU report adds another dimension to those concerns: despite years of observation, technical assistance and reform recommendations, several fundamental weaknesses remain.

New concerns over results and electoral justice

Beyond the recurring problems, the 2026 report identified serious concerns about the handling of election results and post-election developments.

The EU reported that the Electoral Commission of Zambia's six-hour nationwide suspension of counting and announcement of results on 14 August was insufficiently explained.

Observers subsequently documented procedural irregularities and reduced transparency during results tabulation.

The mission also raised concerns about the absence of publicly available, comprehensive polling-station-level results.

Another significant finding concerned the closure of courts between 24 and 26 August, which restricted access to judicial processes during the constitutionally prescribed period for filing presidential election petitions.

Despite these concerns, the EU acknowledged that polling day was generally calm, electoral preparations were largely professional and voters had a competitive choice of candidates.

The mission issued 13 recommendations, including eight priority reforms covering electoral transparency, equal campaign conditions, media independence, freedom of expression, observer access and electoral justice.

A quarter-century of warnings

The recurring findings suggest that Zambia's electoral challenges extend beyond the political party occupying State House.

The same institutional weaknesses have been documented under different administrations, even as governing parties and opposition leaders exchange positions.

For ordinary voters, the unresolved issues affect whether competing candidates have equal opportunities to campaign, whether citizens receive balanced information and whether election results can be independently scrutinised.

The latest EU report therefore raises a fundamental question about electoral accountability.

After at least 25 years of election observation and repeated recommendations, what will it take for Zambia's political leaders to implement reforms that have remained outstanding across successive governments?

Two Men Remain in Custody Despite Discontinuance of Robbery Case

Questions mount over disputed identification evidence and police conduct as families say two men accused of aggravated robbery remain in custody despite the discontinuance of their prosecution.

By Gibson Zulu

Two young men accused of aggravated robbery remain in custody nearly a week after prosecutors discontinued their case, raising fresh questions about their continued detention and the handling of an investigation marked by disputed identification evidence.

Solomon Mbewe, 26, and Felix Chipili, 22, have been detained for more than eight months over a robbery they deny committing.

On 23 October 2026, the National Prosecution Authority (NPA) discontinued proceedings against them through a nolle prosequi, but a family source has confirmed to MakanDay that the two remain in custody.

According to the source, neither man has been informed of fresh charges. MakanDay has not independently established the legal basis for their continued detention.

Under Section 81(1) of Zambia's Criminal Procedure Code, a nolle prosequi requires an accused person to be discharged and released from custody in relation to the discontinued proceedings. However, it does not prevent fresh prosecution on the same facts.

Why, then, do Mbewe and Chipili remain in custody despite the discontinuance of their prosecution and no reports of fresh charges?

Police have neither explained the circumstances of their continued detention nor responded to MakanDay's request for comment, submitted on 17 March 2026.

Identification under scrutiny

The case arose from a robbery at Mulobela Village in the Ten Miles area of Lusaka on 3 February 2026.

The complainant, Michael Kalebwe, reported that masked intruders broke into his home at night, attacked him and his wife, and stole K9,000.

However, Kalebwe later told MakanDay that he had not clearly seen the attackers' faces.

"Truth be told, I never saw the attackers' faces. I couldn't recognise them by their faces during the attack," he said. Kalebwe also disclosed that a community member had shown him photographs of Mbewe and Chipili, identifying them as suspects before he attended a police identification parade.

This raises questions about the reliability of the identification process because prior exposure to suspects' photographs can influence a witness's subsequent identification.

During cross-examination at the Lusaka High Court on 21 October, Inspector Bridget Katongo, who supervised the identification parade on 7 February, acknowledged differences in height, clothing and other physical characteristics among the participants.

She also agreed that parade participants should have similar physical characteristics.

Kalebwe's wife reportedly identified Chipili during the parade but did not identify Mbewe. Her identification remains a separate piece of evidence requiring scrutiny.

Two Men Remain in Custody Despite Discontinuance of Robbery Case cont...

Although these circumstances do not establish that the identifications were false, they raise questions about whether investigators adequately tested their reliability before pursuing aggravated robbery charges.

Police officer warned complainant against changing account MakanDay's investigation also uncovered evidence of a conversation on 8 October 2026 between Kalebwe and the officer who arrested the two men.

During the exchange, which MakanDay independently verified, the officer advised Kalebwe against telling the court that Mbewe and Chipili were not responsible for the robbery.

Instead, the officer suggested that Kalebwe tell the court he had forgiven them.

The officer expressed concern that telling the court the men had been wrongly identified could expose police to compensation claims.

This raises questions about whether concern over potential police liability influenced the advice given to a key prosecution witness. It does not establish that the officer fabricated evidence or that other investigators shared his position.

However, the distinction between forgiveness and mistaken identification is significant.

A complainant who forgives an offender is not necessarily disputing the offence or the offender's identity. A complainant who says the wrong people were arrested is directly challenging the evidence connecting the accused to the crime.

Kalebwe said he had sought to withdraw his complaint approximately three months after the arrests and subsequently wrote to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The NPA confirmed receiving his second letter, dated 11 September 2026, following an inquiry from MakanDay. However, the Director of Public Prosecutions has not responded to MakanDay's request for comment.

It remains unclear when prosecutors became fully aware of Kalebwe's doubts about the identification of the accused and whether they reassessed the evidence before discontinuing the case.

Families describe arrests and alleged mob violence The families have also challenged the circumstances surrounding the arrests.

Zetty Njobvu, mother of one of the accused, alleged that her son was attacked after attempting to intervene when community members assaulted the other suspect.

She further alleged that petrol was poured on him before a village headman intervened.

MakanDay has not independently verified these allegations, and police accounts of the arrests differ from those provided by the family.

According to the family's account, community suspicion partly arose because one of the men was believed to resemble an attacker.

The allegations raise questions about whether police obtained sufficient independent evidence linking the suspects to the robbery beyond the disputed identifications.

Accused reportedly rejected plea bargain

During proceedings in court on 8 October, the prosecution and defence discussed the possibility of reducing the aggravated robbery charge through plea bargaining.

Njobvu said the accused had told her that Legal Aid lawyers proposed a lesser charge that could result in a shorter sentence.

She said both rejected the proposal, maintaining that they had not committed the robbery.

Plea bargaining is a recognised legal process and its consideration does not establish wrongdoing by prosecutors or defence lawyers.

However, the family's account highlights the difficult choices facing accused persons who maintain their innocence while spending months in custody.

MakanDay has not established that either man was improperly pressured to accept a plea bargain.

Why are they still detained?

The NPA's decision to discontinue proceedings on 23 October should have brought the men's detention under that case to an end, unless another lawful basis exists for holding them.

A nolle prosequi is not an acquittal and does not prevent fresh charges. But the possibility of future prosecution does not, by itself, authorise continued detention.

The family maintains that Mbewe and Chipili remain in custody without fresh charges, although MakanDay has yet to establish whether any other detention order or proceedings exist.

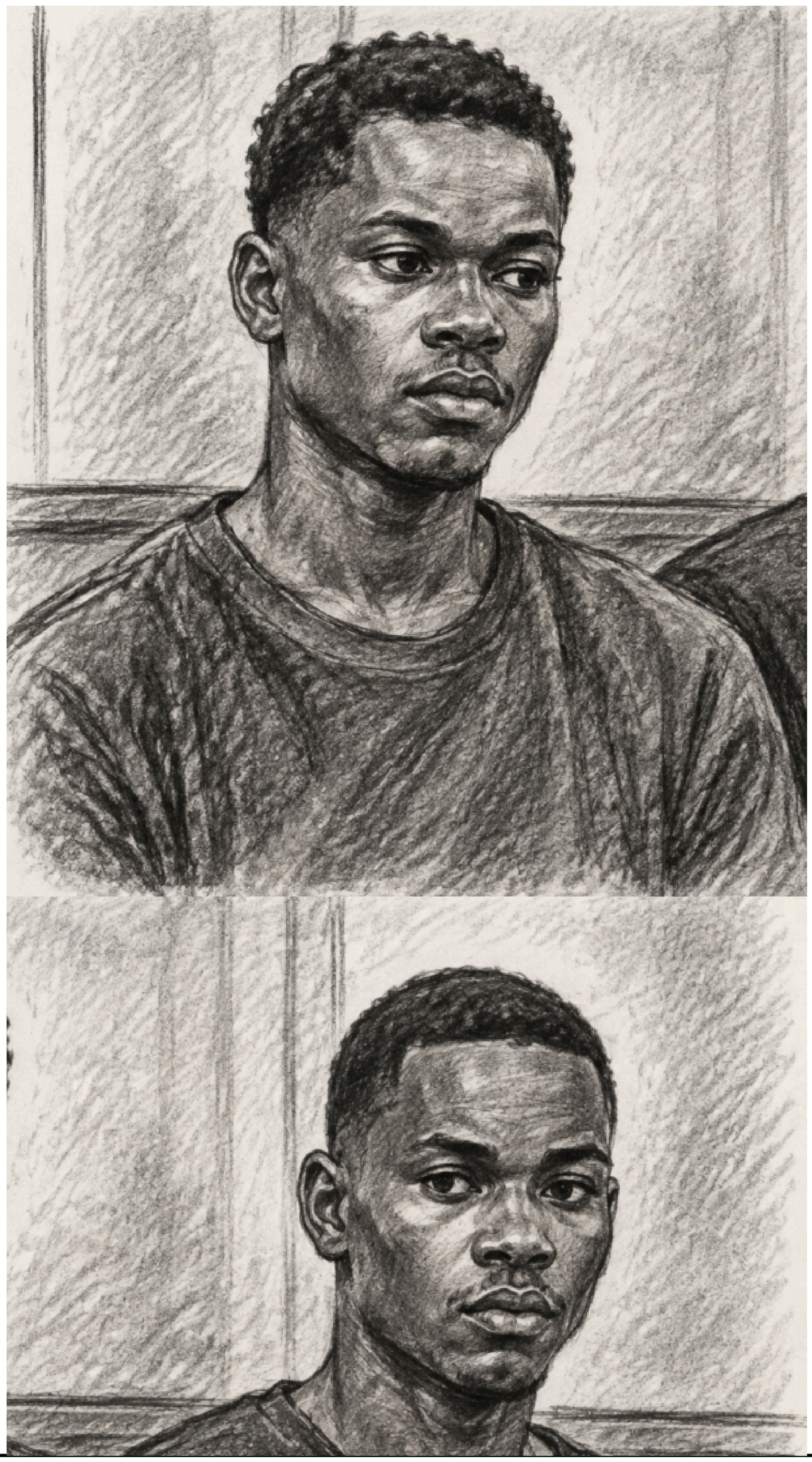
The NPA has not responded to MakanDay's earlier request for comment on the handling of the case. A further explanation is required concerning the discontinuance and the men's reported continued detention.

The Police Public Complaints Commission also has yet to clarify the status and outcome of a complaint reportedly submitted by the family in July this year.

For Mbewe and Chipili, the consequences extend beyond the more than eight months they have spent in custody facing disputed criminal charges.

Chipili has already missed the opportunity to resit his grade 12 General Certificate of Education examinations because of his continued detention. Although he was taken to register for the examinations in handcuffs, he was not allowed to sit them, according to a family source.

Their case raises a more immediate question about the administration of justice in Zambia: what lawful authority, if any, is keeping two men in custody after the criminal proceedings against them were discontinued?



EDITORIAL

Different Governments, Same Electoral Problems

Reading European Union election observation reports on Zambia over the past 25 years feels like reading the same script over and over again.

The years change, the presidents change, and the political parties in power change. But the complaints remain remarkably familiar - police interference, misuse of government resources, biased coverage by state-owned media and unfair conditions for opposition parties.

For an ordinary Zambian voter, it is a familiar cycle. A political party complains about unfair treatment while in opposition, promises to do things differently when elected, but once in government, many of the same problems persist.

The latest EU election observation report, released on 3 November 2026, suggests that Zambia has yet to break this cycle.

The report tells a familiar story. Whether under the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD), Patriotic Front (PF) or United Party for National Development (UPND), successive governments have failed to address some of the same electoral problems.

Take the issue of state-owned media.

In 2011, the EU reported that public broadcasters favoured the ruling MMD. The same complaints emerged under the PF in 2016 and 2021.

Fast-forward to 2026, and the EU found that the ruling UPND received 96.2% of monitored political airtime on ZNBC television and 90.5% on radio.

The political parties have changed, but the problem remains.
And why should this concern an ordinary Zambian?

Because ZNBC is a public broadcaster, not a ruling party broadcaster. Every citizen, regardless of political affiliation, deserves access to balanced information to make an informed choice at the ballot box.

The same applies to the police. When opposition parties are prevented from holding meetings or campaigning freely, voters lose the opportunity to hear alternative ideas.

Then there is the question of money. Who finances our political parties? How much do they spend during elections? And are public resources being used to benefit those already in power?

These are questions that election observers have raised repeatedly, yet Zambia still lacks comprehensive legislation regulating political party financing.

Perhaps the most troubling finding is how little progress has been made.
Of the 22 recommendations the EU made after the 2021 elections, only one had been fully implemented by August 2026. Four had been partially implemented.

This is not to suggest that nothing has improved. The EU acknowledged some reforms and generally calm voting during the August elections.

But holding elections peacefully is only part of democracy. The conditions under which candidates compete, voters receive information and results are verified matter just as much.

For years, international observers have come to Zambia, monitored elections, written reports and recommended reforms. Yet many of those recommendations remain on paper.

The question is no longer whether Zambia knows what needs to change. The reports have made that clear.

The real question is whether our political leaders are willing to make changes that might also benefit their opponents.

Democracy should not depend on which political party occupies State House. The rules must be fair to everyone, whether in government or opposition.

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.

FEATURE

Zambia: Widespread Repression in Post-Election Crackdown

- *Opposition Members and Critics Forcibly Disappeared, Arbitrarily Detained, Beaten*

- Zambian police and military forcibly disappeared, arbitrarily detained, beat, and threatened opposition members, lawyers, journalists, and government critics in the days before and after general elections in August.

- The post-election climate of intimidation, harassment, and repression has had a chilling effect on civic and political organizations, particularly on dissenting voices.

- The authorities should immediately halt the crackdown, allow access to lawyers and medical care to detainees, release everyone arbitrarily detained, and ensure accountability for abuses.

(Johannesburg) – The Zambian police and military forcibly disappeared, arbitrarily detained, beat, and threatened opposition members and supporters as well as lawyers, journalists, and government critics in the days before and after general elections in August 2026, Human Rights Watch said today. The authorities have also yet to credibly explain or investigate the killing of an opposition leader in contested circumstances.

“Zambia’s government should break this dangerous cycle of repression,” said Ashwanee Budoo-Scholtz, deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “The authorities should immediately halt the ongoing post-election crackdown, allow access to lawyers and provide medical care for those in detention, release everyone arbitrarily detained, and ensure accountability for abuses by security forces.”

President Hakainde Hichilema was reelected in the August 13 election, which observers said was marred by irregularities such as a suspension of counting and limited fundamental freedoms. From August 24 to 28, the authorities suspended judicial services and prevented legal challenges to the presidential election results, closing and cordoning off court premises. Zambian police stated that the closures were an “intelligence-led and preventive measure,” without providing details.

Human Rights Watch documented 14 cases in August that appear to have been enforced disappearances, in which the authorities refused to reveal the situation and whereabouts of a detained person. Several of these people were initially forcibly disappeared for days. Victims, family members, and lawyers said that the military held some of them.

Human Rights Watch also documented 61 cases in which detainees or their lawyers and relatives allege that they were beaten or otherwise violently abused during their arrest, in detention, or both. Eighteen have been charged with treason, with two also facing sedition charges. In many cases, the people detained were never charged with a crime while in others, the charges against them appear to be politically motivated. The government has not disclosed how many people were arrested during the crackdown or the charges against them, prompting concerns that the number of people detained is higher than presently known.

Human Rights Watch has also documented two cases in which the Zambia-based relatives of government critics living abroad say government authorities harassed and threatened them.

The post-election climate of intimidation, harassment, and repression has had a chilling effect on civic and political organizations, particularly on dissenting voices, Human Rights Watch said. On September 11, the government announced the cancellation of six government critics’ passports, including that of an academic, Sishuwa Sishuwa, for “security reasons.”

On August 14, security forces raided the home of the Tonse Alliance opposition leader, Brian Mundubile, in a suburb of Lusaka, the capital. Opposition members present allege that security forces killed a former government minister, Mutotwe Kafwaya, during the raid. Inspector General of the Zambia Police Service Graphel Musamba said members of a “joint intelligence-led operation” were met with “gunfire and resistance from unknown individuals” that “prompted officers to return fire,” and that Kafwaya had been killed in the process. Kafwaya’s fate was not known until August 19, after his wife filed a habeas corpus petition to compel authorities to disclose his whereabouts, bring him before court, and show sufficient and lawful cause for his continued detention.

Public officials made contradictory statements about the raid and who was responsible for it. On August 15, the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA) sent out a text message to all registered phones in Zambia stating: “Beware of false reports of shootings and abductions. Stay calm and peaceful.” The Ministry of Information and Media dismissed reports of the raid and shooting as “disinformation intended to alarm and mislead the public.”

The police also issued a media statement denying that there had been a raid and that Mundubile was in police custody. Police Inspector General Musamba later admitted that there had been a “joint security-led intelligence operation” at Mundubile’s home.

Mundubile, who was later arrested and charged with treason, stated in a High Court petition that Human Rights Watch has seen that he saw a member of the military fatally shoot Kafwaya.

Given the conflicting statements by government officials about who was responsible for the raid on Mundubile’s home and the circumstances surrounding Kafwaya’s killing, Zambian authorities should institute an independent, impartial, and thorough investigation into the matter, Human Rights Watch said.

Detainees have implicated Zambia’s military in arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. Forty-three opposition members acting as election monitors were detained on August 14. Their lawyer said their whereabouts had been unknown for eight days and that the police had denied holding them. When a lawyer finally saw them, he told Human Rights Watch that “most of them were swollen and had terrible injuries, including broken bones. They said they had been brutalized by the military.” Their lawyers filed a habeas corpus application and, on September 10, a court in Lusaka ordered their immediate release.

Under Zambian law and international human rights law, all detainees have the right to due process, including to be promptly informed of the charges against them, to have access to counsel if charged with a crime, to have their detention reviewed by a judge, and to be presumed innocent. They should also have access to adequate medical care and be able to communicate with their families.

In a September 2 call, the United Nations special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and of association said that the authorities should “release all political detainees, respect fundamental freedoms, and restore democratic accountability.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation said in response that the call was “inaccurate, undiplomatic and falling short of the standards of objectivity, moderation and discretion expected of UN mandate holders.”

The ministry said that being a member of opposition party “does not place a person beyond the reach of the law, nor does it convert a criminal suspect into a political detainee...

Zambia: Widespread Repression in Post-Election Crackdown cont..

The government is committed to ensuring that these protections are respected in every case, and Zambia's courts are open to test them."

Zambia will serve as a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2027-2029 term. As a council member, Zambia is expected to "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights."

"The Zambian government's needs to end its brazen human rights crackdown," Budoo-Scholtz said. "Leaders in Southern Africa and Zambia's development partners should encourage President Hichilema to restore the rule of law and ensure that civic and political spaces are protected."

Enforced Disappearances, Including by Military Personnel
Human Rights Watch documented 14 cases of apparent enforced disappearances of opposition members and supporters, including some in which the authorities denied holding people who were later produced after habeas corpus applications.

The authorities claimed to have arrested 11 men during the August 14 raid on Mundubile's home.

Lawyers and family members of seven of the men said that they were made to lie down and were beaten using fists, rifle butts, and sticks, kicked by men in military uniform, then blindfolded and driven away in military vehicles. Victims and witnesses identified members of Zambia's military through their uniforms and military vehicles.

During the same raid, security forces picked up several opposition members and supporters and forcibly disappeared them for days before family members or their lawyers found them. They included Bishop Trevor Mwamba, an opposition leader; Patrick Mwansa, a leading opposition campaigner; and security aides Jackson Mutyoka, Bernard Chewe, Brazil Soko, Francis Mulenga, and Richard Banda.

According to their lawyers and court documents seen by Human Rights Watch, the men were taken to a "military command center" where they were "screened and processed" then detained in "various police stations around Lusaka." Lawyers and family members said they went around police stations in Lusaka looking for the detainees, but authorities denied holding the men. However, some were found days later at the same stations where the police had denied holding them.

Mwansa's family said he had a broken finger and swollen face when they finally located him four days later in Lusaka's Central Police Station. On September 6, Mwansa was moved to a maximum security prison in Kabwe, 150 kilometers from Lusaka, and has not yet received medical treatment, a family member said.

The family of Bishop Mwamba, president of the opposition United National Independence Party, who was also picked up during the raid at Mundubile's home, said they searched for him in police stations in and around Lusaka for four days before locating him at Matero Police Station. Earlier, including on the day he was located, officers at Matero Police Station had denied holding Mwamba.

"He had spent days without food and without taking his prescription medication," the relative said. "The police had first denied [holding him] but we insisted to see him, because we had received an anonymous tip informing us that he was at Matero. When they brought him out and we asked what he was arrested for, police said they had no charge for him 'because he was brought in by the military who asked us to keep him in the cells for them.'"

On August 30, when the family took food and pain killers to Benard Chewe at Kabwata Police Station, where he had been detained, officers there told them that he had been moved but claimed that they did not know where. When the family traced him two days later to Mwembeshi Correctional Facility on the outskirts of Lusaka, they were denied access.

Men in unmarked vehicles who introduced themselves as "state intelligence officers" picked up Harry Findlay, a Lusaka businessman and opposition supporter, from his residence on August 4, a family member said. Neither his lawyer nor family had access to him, and the authorities did not inform them of his whereabouts. Findlay's lawyers sent two letters to Zambian authorities, on August 7 and August 17, requesting his whereabouts and calling for his immediate release and access to doctors, lawyers, and family.

On August 20, Findlay was taken to court under a judge's order to inquire into the legality of his detention. On August 29, he was charged with treason and moved to Mukobeko Maximum Security Prison, where he remains without trial.

All the men detained in the August 14 raid were eventually charged with treason and remain in detention without having appeared in court. Human Rights Watch believes that in these cases, Zambian authorities are using treason charges, which are nonbailable, and sedition, which carries a heavy penalty, to stifle dissent and political opposition.
On August 27, police arrested Mundubile and his running mate, Makebi Zulu, and subsequently also charged them with treason and seditious practices. The charge sheet, which Human Rights Watch has seen, alleges that Mundubile and Zulu went on Facebook live on August 14 stating that the opposition had won the election. The government alleges that this was meant to "raise discontent or disaffection among the people of Zambia."

On September 22, the Law Association of Zambia raised concerns about prolonged detentions without court appearances. Zambia's Human Rights Commission on September 3 said it was following 84 election-related detainees whose cases it cast as part of a "disturbing pattern of prolonged detention, delayed notification of charges, restricted access to family and legal representation and failure to bring detainees before a competent court without undue delay."

Abuse and Ill-Treatment in Custody

Human Rights Watch documented that 61 people had been mistreated in custody by reviewing court documents and interviewing family members.

Lawyers for the 43 opposition members acting as election monitors who were detained on August 14 said that state security agents kicked and beat them and denied them food during the first 8 days of their 21-day detention.

Lawyers representing 18 detainees accused of treason state in court documents that the detainees were abused and assaulted in custody and denied medical attention. The lawyers also said 10 of the 18—George Chisanga, Patrick Mwansa, Trevor Mwamba, Francis Mulenga, Brazil Soko, Jackson Mutyoka, Bernard Chewe, Richard Banda, Emmanuel Mulenga, and Darius Mwila—had been restricted from accessing their lawyers or family members.

In a court petition filed on September 11, Ezra Topola, Dickson Tembo, and Victor Muzyamba alleged that security personnel waterboarded them and suspended them from a metal bar and beat them. Findlay alleged that he was kept in solitary confinement in Mwembeshi Correctional Facility and denied access to his prescription medication. Mwansa alleged that he suffered serious injuries, including cuts to his face and a fracture on his hand, but was denied access to medical attention.

Family members told Human Rights Watch that when they found Mutyoka on August 17 at Lusaka's Central Police Station, three days after military detained him at Mundubile's home, he showed signs of having been physically abused. "When we saw him, his face was swollen, he was coughing blood and was limping," a relative said. "He said they had been made to lie down in the yard of Mundubile's home and beaten using rifle butts and whips by masked men in military unform. All he wanted was to see a doctor,

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but that request was denied and, to this day, he has not been seen by a doctor."

When Chewe's family members found him at Kabwata Police Station three days after he was taken from Mundubile's home, they said that he too showed signs of physical abuse. "He had a swollen forehead, busted lips, and complained of body pains," a relative said. "He said he had been assaulted by the military at their headquarters before they took him to the police station."

Lawyers for Chewe, Mutyoka, and Soko at Mwembeshi Correctional Facility said that Zambia Army Special Forces personnel interrogated them and that on September 10, authorities moved the three to Mukobeko Maximum Security Prison without informing family or lawyers.

On October 27, family members said medical doctors have not yet seen the three despite urgent letters written on September 9, seen by Human Rights Watch, to the commissioner of the Zambia Correctional Service and the officer-in-charge of Mwembeshi Correctional Facility.

Eight election monitors for the opposition, men aged 21 to 26, said a group of armed soldiers wearing uniforms and masks jumped over the perimeter wall into a house in Lusaka's Emmasdale township on August 15 around 8 p.m., where the monitors were meeting. They said the armed soldiers dragged them out of the house, kicked them with boots, and beat them with fists and sticks.

They were forced into a military truck and taken away but could not identify where they were held. For the next three days, security forces beat them several times a day, demanding confessions that they belonged to "Brian Mundubile's militia." All eight were released on August 18 without charge.

Human Rights Watch has also examined a petition filed on September 11 by lawyers for the 18 accused of treason that implicates the army in interrogations and abuse of detainees.

In the petition, lawyers allege that special forces personnel led by Gen. Moses Shapwaya threatened and intimidated some of the detainees in prison to force them to incriminate Mundubile and Zulu.

Arbitrary Arrests and Detention

From court records and interviews with victims, family, and lawyers, Human Rights Watch documented 71 cases in which opposition members and supporters, as well as government critics, were arrested on charges that may be politically motivated or held in prolonged detention without charge. These include the 43 election monitors and 17 musicians and comedians who were detained after performing at an opposition rally, among others.

The arrest of the 43 monitors came after the opposition leader stated that he planned to challenge the election result in court, while the government accused him of plotting an insurgency. In an electoral court challenge, the monitors would have been potential witnesses for the opposition's case. After their 21 days in detention without charge, the court ruled that their arrest was unjustified and ordered their immediate release.

Human Rights Watch interviewed a 44-year-old Lusaka mathematician who was hired to tally numbers for a potential court challenge to President Hichilema's election. He said that on August 15 at about 9:30 p.m., about eight armed men who identified themselves as intelligence and police officers broke into his house and harassed him. They demanded access to his phone and laptop, he said, and to know who was funding the court challenge.

He said they dragged him outside, put him into a vehicle, and took him to the police headquarters in Lusaka, where he was interrogated further about the election petition. The next day, he was transferred to Ridgeway Police Station, where he spent 18 days without being charged. On August 28, his lawyer filed a habeas corpus application in the Lusaka High Court, which Human Rights Watch has seen.

Five days later, police charged him with a misdemeanor offense and released him the same day.

Before the election, on August 5, a group of 17 people were arrested after performing at an opposition rally in Mongu, Western province. Police detained them for over two weeks on what was initially said to be a traffic offense of travelling in a vehicle without numbered plates, a lawyer familiar with the case told Human Rights Watch.

The lawyer said that the group's arrest and prolonged detention were politically motivated because of their vocal and visible mobilization for the opposition. Police later charged and prosecuted the 17 for "riotous assembly or behavior." In a court document seen by Human Rights Watch, the state alleges that the 17 did "unlawfully assemble and begun to execute a common purpose by a breach of peace and the terror of the public." A court released them on bail on August 30, after over three weeks in detention.

Driven into Hiding

Human Rights Watch interviewed seven people, including lawyers and a journalist, who said they had fled their homes because they believed they had been targeted for arrest in the days after the August 13 election. A lawyer and a journalist showed Human Rights Watch messages on their phones alerting them that they were on a "wanted list." Some left and others were in hiding within the country.

A statement by seven international lawyers' associations said some lawyers involved in preparing or lodging election-related legal challenges had fled Zambia due to threats to their safety.

A lawyer said that he went into hiding on August 15 after scores of security agents came to his home and office. The lawyer had been acting on behalf of Tonse Alliance, including working on a court petition to challenge President Hichilema's election. "There was no reason for the security agents to chase me in that manner," he said. "If the police wanted me for any reason, they should have alerted me, and I would have presented myself with my legal representatives."

Mulenga Kapwepwe, an opposition leader who worked closely with Mundubile and Zulu, said she went into hiding on August 15 after confidential sources alerted her that she was "on a wanted list." "I have had to rearrange my life," she said. "Many of my colleagues are in detention charged with treason, and I have been warned that the moment I come out of hiding, I will be targeted."

On August 17, a journalist who runs an investigative journalism website and has previously been detained for his journalism crossed the border into a neighboring country hours before security agents went to his house looking for him. "My website was following up on the raid at Mundubile's house," he said. "That is when I received messages on my phone saying: 'Stop what you are doing. We are coming after you.' I was once arrested and detained without charge for nearly two weeks. I know what these people are capable of. So, fearful for my life, I left."

While he was fleeing, the journalist said, he received a call from a family member that about five people who identified themselves as officers from Office of the President were at his house looking for him. They told his family that he was wanted for sedition.

Harassment of Family Members

Human Rights Watch documented two cases in which the authorities allegedly harassed and threatened the Zambia-based family members of government critics living abroad.

Police allegedly detained two siblings of a well-known diaspora critic of the government and harassed their 76-year-old father, demanding that their sibling abroad, who runs a popular social media page with hundreds of thousands of followers, take down material critical of the government.

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One sibling was detained in a 3 a.m. raid on their home, in which armed police officers demanded access to their phones and laptop, a close source said, adding that one of the police officers "had a gun and said: 'This is a high security operation." The officers said the foreign-based sibling's "political commentary was 'a problem' and that they needed it to stop." The authorities allegedly demanded the removal of specific videos as a condition for their release. In one of these videos, the social media personality demanded an independent inquiry into the August 14 killing of Kafwaya.

In another case, a government critic in the United States with investments in Zambia said that three men who identified themselves as intelligence officers from the Office of the President approached family members in Zambia days after the election and threatened to "squeeze" her businesses if she continued to criticize President Hichilema's administration on social media. "They told my sister, a civil servant, that she risked losing her job if I did not tone down my criticism," the critic said.



A police vehicle on the outskirts of Lusaka, Zambia, August 14, 2026. © 2026 Alfonso Nqunjana/AP Photo



The Finance Minister Proposes, Parliament Scrutinises

How Zambia's Budget Works

When a parent takes a sick child to a government hospital and finds no medicine, or a pupil sits on the floor because a school has no desks, the problem often comes down to one question: how is public money being spent?

This Friday, November 6, Minister of Finance and National Planning Situmbeko Musokotwane is expected to present Zambia's 2027 national budget in parliament.

For many Zambians, the budget presentation is an annual event filled with figures, economic forecasts and unfamiliar financial terms. But behind those numbers are decisions that affect everyday life, from the price of goods to the availability of medicines, teachers and public services.

So, what exactly happens when the finance minister stands before parliament to present the budget?

Under the national assembly's Standing Orders, the minister responsible for finance must present estimates of how much money the government expects to collect and spend during the following financial year.

The minister's responsibility goes beyond delivering a speech. The budget outlines the government's spending priorities, how it intends to raise revenue and how much it plans to borrow.

But presenting the budget does not mean parliament has approved it. Once the estimates are presented, they are referred to parliamentary committees for detailed examination. The speaker then suspends ordinary business to allow this process to take place.

Under Standing Orders 2024, each committee scrutinises the proposed allocations for the ministries and departments under its oversight.

Ministers must appear before the relevant committees to explain their spending plans and answer questions. Committees may also receive submissions from other stakeholders.

For example, MPs examining the education budget can question whether the proposed funding is sufficient to improve classrooms, recruit teachers or provide learning materials.

Committees have ten working days to submit their findings to the Expanded Planning and Budgeting Committee, which consolidates the reports for parliament.

Importantly, committees can recommend changes to certain allocations, although the Standing Orders place restrictions on how money can be moved between expenditure categories.

The finance minister then moves a motion of supply, allowing MPs to debate the proposed budget. The debate may last up to ten sitting days.
Parliament subsequently considers individual expenditure allocations through the Committee of Supply.

Once that process is completed and its report adopted, the minister introduces the Appropriation Bill, which provides the legal basis for spending the approved funds.

This is why the budget is not simply the finance minister's responsibility.Cabinet proposes the spending plan, but parliament has crucial role in scrutinising and authorising it.

For ordinary citizens, the important question is not just how many billions of kwacha the minister announces on Friday.

It is whether their MPs will carefully question those allocations and whether the money ultimately translates into better services in their communities.



From the Bulletin & Record Archives

Long before she became known for her soulful voice and Afro-Jazz hits, Zambian singer Jemimah Lerato Chuulu, popularly known as Scarlet, had dreams of becoming a lawyer. But music took her in a different direction. In this interview, first published by the Bulletin & Record in November 2025, Scarlet shared five surprising things about her life, ambitions and musical journey. MakanDay Weekly revisits the conversation as part of its Bulletin & Record Archives series.

The Scarlet lady with 5 surprises

Jemimah Lerato Chuulu, otherwise known as Scarlet, is a Soul and Afro-Jazz Zambian singer responsible for hits such as "Munisungile Banja" as well as "Ni Pempa". Her first studio album, Unforgettably Yours was released in 2012. She is currently working on her sophomore album, Iyashi.

She won the 2012 Born and Bred Best Upcoming Artist award. She was also nominated for the 2012 Born and Bred Best R&B Song award as well as the 2012 Ngoma award for Most Promising Upcoming Performer. She was the only woman among the artists who performed at the Stanbic Jazz festival last month. Thandie Msimuko sat down for a chat to get an idea of just what it is that makes this talent tick, and Scarlet came up with five surprises.

She never dreamt of becoming a musician. Instead, growing up, she dreamt of becoming a lawyer. "I wanted to wear suits and I wanted to drive really expensive cars. I thought I'd be a brilliant lawyer because I talk a lot and can out-argue anyone – [this was] especially when I was younger. Now I'm a lot more tolerant; am more accepting of other people's opinions and probably get pushed around a lot more."

She is a great cook – so much so that she owns a catering company and prepares the meals herself. "The catering company is called Jam Catering and I do fancy food. I'm not a chef by profession but I do fancy home-cooked food. So, it's like, when you go to your grandma's house and you have Sunday dinner and it's really good. That's what you get when you get me."

She likes to keep busy. When asked whether or not she intends to focus exclusively on her music going forward, Scarlet responds, "I actually hate having to focus on just one thing. There's a lot I would like to do: I love beauty so having a cosmetics line would be nice; I also love fashion and would love to open a store one day. I'd also like to do lifestyle television. So, music is like my annoying husband that I can't live without and everything else is the kids and the boyfriend."

She enjoys the process of making music more than the outcome because "even though the song may be great, once it's out, it's not my thing anymore, it's yours. It becomes yours to judge, to like; it's yours to consume, to hate. It stops being mine. But the process is all mine because you don't know anything about it while I'm doing it. So, while I'm at it, I'm digging deep, and I'm singing really hard, and I'm tearing my throat, or fighting with the producer – it's a labour of love and it's all mine!"

She is part of Imoshi – a project comprising 15 artists from Southern Africa. It was formed to address, through music, issues related to natural disasters and the preservation of the ecosystem faced by people in the southern African region. The group of musicians was enlisted to perform at the SADC heads of state meeting in Botswana and she considers that the highest point of her career to date.

"We were two metres away from Robert Mugabe, King Mswati, our own president Edgar Lungu. It was amazing! We didn't talk to them or go to any dinners or anything but just being in the same room as them and being able to sing with these amazing musicians who've been in the game for, like, 100 years like Siphokadzi from South Africa...For me to be given that opportunity; to be considered good enough to go and be in that room – I'm still mind-blown."

