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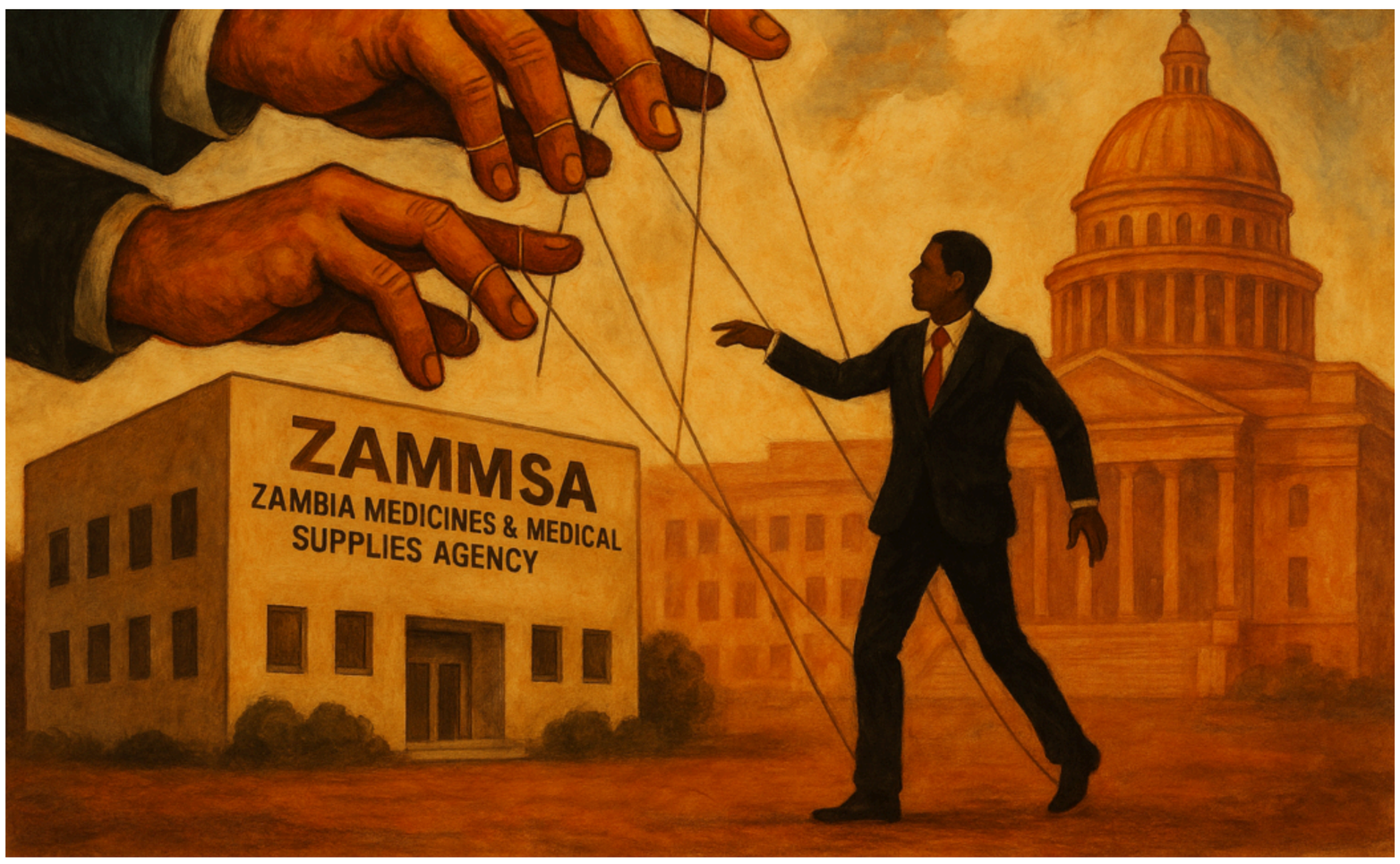

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ZAMMSA mass dismissals, procurement irregularities & political interference

By MakanDay Reporter

When patients visit government hospitals and clinics in Zambia, they expect to receive the medicines prescribed by health workers. But behind the supply of those medicines is a government agency facing serious questions about procurement irregularities, political interference and the dismissal of most of its employees.

The Zambia Medicines and Medical Supplies Agency (Zammsa), responsible for storing and distributing medicines and medical supplies to public health facilities, is undergoing a major restructuring following a forensic audit that reportedly uncovered inflated procurement prices, missing records, unaccounted-for stock and the alleged diversion of medicines.

Health Minister Professor Roma Chilengi announced the restructuring on October 2, saying the changes were intended to address longstanding problems at the agency.

However, interviews conducted by MakanDay with a former Zammsa chief and a well-placed Ministry of Health source reveal conflicting accounts of what went wrong, who should be held responsible and whether the mass dismissals will address the agency's underlying problems.

While the ministry source alleges that some employees used their positions to benefit from medicine supply contracts, the former agency chief argues that inadequate funding and political interference contributed to Zammsa's difficulties.

Both have called for the forensic audit report to be made public, raising questions about the evidence used to justify the dismissals and whether responsibility for the agency's problems extends beyond its employees.

The restructuring has also raised concerns about Zammsa's future, including unverified claims that the government is considering involving international logistics company DP World in its operations.

Questions over unpublished forensic audit

At the centre of the controversy is a forensic audit commissioned by the Office of the Auditor General, whose findings have been cited in connection with the restructuring of Zammsa.

The audit reportedly identified irregularities involving medicine procurement, stock management and record-keeping. However, MakanDay has not obtained the report and has been unable to independently establish the full extent of its findings or whether it implicated individual employees in wrongdoing.

The former Zammsa chief and the health ministry source, despite their opposing views on the dismissals, both believe the report should be made public.

The former official questioned whether the audit adequately considered the circumstances surrounding procurement and management decisions.

The absence of a publicly available audit report leaves important questions unanswered, including what evidence was established against employees, whether individual responsibility was assessed before their employment was terminated and whether the audit identified failures involving senior management or political officeholders.

MakanDay asked the health ministry to provide a copy of the audit or indicate when its findings would be made public.

The ministry was also asked to confirm the number of affected employees, the procedures followed in terminating their employment and whether individual assessments of wrongdoing had been conducted. It had not responded by the publication deadline.

Employees accused of benefiting from medicine contracts

A well-placed health ministry source defended the mass dismissals, alleging that some ZAMMSA employees had established or were involved in companies that benefited from contracts to supply medicines.

The source claimed that some suppliers were awarded contracts but failed to deliver the medicines they were contracted to provide.

"There is a political cartel, but there was also a cartel of young people within ZAMMSA who had established companies and awarded themselves supply contracts," the source alleged.

However, the source did not identify the companies or employees allegedly involved, nor provide contract records establishing that employees had improperly benefited from procurement decisions.

The source also questioned a procurement order reportedly worth more than K53 million but did not provide documentation showing what the order covered, which company was involved or what irregularities had occurred.

According to the source, only 14 employees were retained to keep the agency operating following the dismissals. MakanDay has not independently confirmed that figure or established the total number of employees whose contracts were terminated.

Despite defending the restructuring, the source acknowledged that some employees who had committed no wrongdoing might have lost their jobs. "It is unfortunate that some innocent people have been fired, but that is the only way the cartel can be dismantled," the source said.

The admission raises questions about whether the restructuring distinguished between employees suspected of wrongdoing and those who were not implicated.

MakanDay was shown an employment separation letter, but the document did not establish that the employee concerned had been involved in any misconduct.

The allegations that employees owned companies benefiting from ZAMMSA contracts, or that suppliers received payments without delivering medicines, have not been independently verified.

On November 10, MakanDay wrote to Zammsa's interim management seeking clarification on the alleged employee-linked companies, the K53 million procurement order and whether any investigations had established wrongdoing by individual employees.

The agency was given until November 17 to respond but had not done so by the publication deadline.

Former Zammsa chief challenges dismissals

While the Ministry of Health source portrayed the dismissals as necessary to dismantle alleged corrupt networks, a former Zammsa chief offered a different explanation for the agency's problems.

He described the mass dismissals as harsh and ill-advised, arguing that ZAMMSA's difficulties could not be attributed solely to employees.

Instead, he pointed to inadequate operational funding and political interference in procurement decisions, which he alleged had undermined the agency's ability to function effectively.

According to the former official, Zammsa was expected to manage medicines and medical supplies worth approximately US$400 million without adequate resources to support its operations.

He alleged that an eight per cent treasury authority allocation intended to support procurement and supply-chain activities had been withdrawn, leaving the agency struggling to finance essential functions such as warehousing and transporting medicines to health facilities.

The former official argued that replacing employees would not necessarily resolve problems caused

- **ZAMMSA mass dismissals, procurement irregularities & political interference cont...**

by funding constraints and interference in management decisions.

His account raises a separate question about the restructuring: whether removing employees will improve the agency's performance if the financial and institutional problems he describes remain unresolved.

The Ministry of Health was asked to clarify Zammsa's operational funding arrangements, including the alleged withdrawal of the eight per cent allocation, but had not responded by the publication deadline.

Allegations of political pressure over procurement

Beyond funding constraints, the former Zammsa chief alleged that political figures had attempted to influence decisions about which companies received contracts to supply medicines.

He recalled receiving a telephone call from a former State House official during an international tender process.

According to his account, the official wanted to know whether a particular pharmaceutical supplier could receive preferential treatment.

In another incident, the former agency chief alleged

that a former health minister wanted international drug company removed from a list of accepted bidders during a mop-up procurement exercise.

A mop-up procurement exercise is an additional round of purchasing intended to address outstanding supply requirements.

The former official claimed that he resisted attempts to influence supplier selection where there was no lawful justification for doing so.

The allegations raise questions about the extent to which procurement decisions at Zammsa may have been subject to pressure from outside the agency.

They also introduce a further dimension to the debate over accountability, particularly whether investigations into procurement irregularities have examined the possible role of political officeholders as well as agency employees.

The health ministry was asked whether political officeholders had attempted to influence procurement decisions and what safeguards were in place to prevent such interference. It had not responded by the publication deadline.

Questions over Zammsa's future and possible DP World involvement

The restructuring has also raised questions about how Zammsa's operations will be managed in the future, including whether the government intends to involve private companies in medicine storage and distribution.

Both the former Zammsa chief and the health ministry source expressed concern about possible private-sector involvement in the agency's operations.

The ministry source alleged that the government was considering engaging DP World, a United Arab Emirates-based logistics company.

The source further claimed that the company had close links to a senior ministry official but provided no evidence of such a relationship or any improper conduct.

MakanDay has not independently established that the government has held discussions with DP World or that any agreement concerning Zammsa's operations exists.

On November 10, MakanDay wrote to DP World seeking clarification on whether it had held discussions with the Ministry of Health or Zammsa, submitted proposals or signed agreements relating to medicine storage and distribution.

The company was also asked about its alleged links to a senior ministry official and whether it intended to take over any Zammsa functions. DP World did not respond by the November 13 deadline.

The health ministry was separately asked whether any discussions or agreements involving DP World had taken place and whether any relevant conflicts of interest had been declared. It had not responded by publication time.

MakanDay has found no verified evidence that DP World has been awarded a contract or that the government has decided to transfer Zammsa's operations to the company.

The former agency chief warned that introducing private management without addressing weaknesses in procurement and oversight could leave the underlying problems unresolved.

What does the restructuring mean for medicine supplies?

Beyond the competing allegations, the restructuring raises questions about Zammsa's ability to continue supplying medicines and medical products to public health facilities.

The agency plays a central role in Zambia's public health system, managing the storage and distribution of medicines and medical supplies needed by hospitals and clinics.

Disruptions to procurement, warehousing or distribution could affect the availability of medicines, particularly for patients who depend on government facilities for treatment.

However, MakanDay has not established whether the dismissals have caused interruptions to medicine deliveries or shortages at health facilities.

The reported retention of only 14 employees, if confirmed, would also raise questions about how the agency intends to maintain its operations and which functions will be performed by the remaining workforce or other service providers.



K7 million for Chama–Matumbo road repairs as MPs question years of delays

Government promises another emergency intervention, but questions remain over repeated expenditure and the absence of a timeline for permanent rehabilitation.

By Gibson Zulu

The government has allocated K7 million for emergency repairs on the worsening Chama–Matumbo road, as members of parliament question years of delays, possible duplication of expenditure and the failure to permanently rehabilitate the strategic road.

The latest intervention comes as communities in Chama district, Eastern Province, face the renewed threat of being cut off from Chinsali district in Muchinga Province during the rainy season, restricting access to healthcare, markets and other essential services.

The matter came under scrutiny in Parliament this week when Chama Central MP Yotam Mtayachalo of the National Reconciliation Party for Unity and Prosperity (NRPUP) asked what urgent measures the government was taking to repair the deteriorating 62-kilometre stretch between Lundu Chiefdom and Luangwa Bridge.

Responding on behalf of Infrastructure and Urban Development Minister Collins Nzovu, Transport and Logistics Minister Charles Milupi disclosed that the Road Development Agency (RDA) had received K2.1 million of the K7 million allocated for emergency repairs.

K7 million for Chama–Matumbo road repairs as MPs question years of delays cont....

He said equipment was being mobilised, with works expected to commence by November 27. However, he did not provide a completion date.

Mr Mtayachalo questioned the prolonged delays, pointing out that RDA had been on the stretch for approximately three years without significant progress.

Lundazi MP Brenda Nyirenda under NRPUP also questioned why previous government promises had not been fulfilled, recalling that Mr Milupi had visited the area and pledged to improve the road during his tenure as infrastructure minister.

Mr Milupi denied that any province was being deliberately sidelined, attributing the delays partly to funding constraints and difficult soil conditions along sections passing through Luangwa National Park.

Questions over repeated expenditure

The government's decision to commission another design consultancy for the road also drew criticism from the Shiwang'andu MP (NRPUP), who questioned whether public resources were being wasted on a project that had previously undergone design work.

Mr Milupi rejected the suggestion, arguing that the stretch presented unique engineering challenges requiring specialised attention.

He said RDA had procured a consultancy contract to design the upgrading of the road to bituminous standards, with the designs expected to be completed by January 2027.

The government intends to invite tenders for the remaining 65 kilometres once the designs are completed, subject to the availability of funds.

Mr Milupi also disclosed that the government was exploring a public-private partnership arrangement to develop the wider road corridor.
However, no definite timeline was given for the commencement of permanent construction.

He assured parliament that necessary remedial works would also be undertaken.

"The need for infrastructure in this country is great, but the availability of resources is scarce," Milupi said.

Years of neglect and unfulfilled commitments

In January 2026, MakanDay, in collaboration with Radio Kwenje, documented the devastating impact of deteriorating roads on communities in Chama.

The report revealed how flooding and impassable roads disrupted patient referrals, increased transport costs, restricted farmers' access to markets and undermined local businesses.

At the time, Mr Milupi, then infrastructure minister, acknowledged that funding constraints had stalled rehabilitation efforts and that the Chama–Matumbo Road struggled to attract private investors because of low traffic volumes.

The latest parliamentary exchanges suggest that little has changed in securing financing for permanent rehabilitation.

A 2025 report by the Parliamentary Committee on Local Governance, Housing and Chiefs' Affairs revealed that works under four contracts covering the Chama–Matumbo and Chama–Lundazi roads had failed to resume because of limited funding.

The projects were subsequently re-scoped and the contracts terminated, with the Government opting for short-term maintenance interventions.

The committee recorded that K11.8 million had been disbursed for drainage maintenance between Lundazi and Matumbo, alongside K16.4 million for spot improvements on the Chama–Lundazi Road.

It urged the government to complete the outstanding works without further delays.

The latest K7 million allocation raises fresh questions about the sustainability and value for money of repeated temporary interventions while permanent rehabilitation remains unfunded.

For Chama residents, the immediate concern is whether the government will release the outstanding K4.9 million and complete the emergency repairs before the rains render sections of the road impassable.

More than a decade after the corridor was identified as strategically important, communities are still waiting for a permanent solution — with another government commitment dependent on the availability of funds.



COMMENT

The Altar Belongs to No Political Party

There is a dangerous spirit growing in our Church today – one that treats politicians as though they are not Christians, as though their sins are greater than ours and they have no place at the altar of God.

That spirit is not the Gospel. It must be rejected.

A politician who is baptised and confirmed is a member of the Body of Christ, a brother or sister in faith. To demonise politicians, shame them for coming to pray or treat them as outsiders is contrary to the teachings of Christ.

The Church is not a club for the pure. It is a hospital for sinners – and we are all sinners. The priest, the bishop, the layperson and the politician.

Who are we to rank sin and declare that the sins of politicians are greater than our own?

Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. He died for politicians and for all of us. No Catholic has the right to close the door that Christ opened.

In defence of Fr. Mwiila

It is against this background that we must defend Fr. Mwiila, who has come under public criticism from Mr Emmanuel Mwamba for allegedly not reading a pastoral letter.

In my view, Fr. Mwiila acted as a pastor concerned with preserving the unity of the Church and the dignity of all members of his congregation, including politicians.

A pastoral letter is not a homily. The homily is reserved for the ordained minister and is intended to explain the Word of God and its relevance to our lives. A pastoral letter, while an important instrument of episcopal teaching, does not automatically replace the homily.

Whether Fr. Mwiila acted contrary to any specific episcopal directive is a matter for the competent Church authorities to determine, not political commentators.

Mr Mwamba, like any other citizen, is entitled to express his opinion. But the right to comment does not confer ecclesiastical authority. He is neither a bishop nor a priest, and there is no such office as Inspector General of the Catholic Church.

The administration and discipline of the Catholic Church must remain the responsibility of its legitimate authorities.

Dialogue before confrontation

Pastoral letters have a legitimate place in the Catholic Church. However, they should not become a substitute for meaningful dialogue.

If there are concerns about the Constitution, presidential term limits or the future of our nation, why not also seek an audience with those concerned? Why not sit around a table, listen and exchange views? Jesus engaged directly with those with whom he disagreed. He challenged them, but he also demonstrated love.

The Church has a moral responsibility to speak out on matters of national importance. It must defend constitutionalism, justice and good governance, regardless of who occupies State House. But it must also ensure that its interventions are informed by facts, guided by charity and consistent with its mission.

Prophetic courage and constructive dialogue are not mutually exclusive.

Why now?

The Church must also be willing to confront uncomfortable questions about its own consistency.

Politicians have previously been welcomed into our churches, given prominent seats, invited to speak and publicly blessed. Why, then, should the presence of politicians in Church today become a source of controversy?

Are we applying the same moral standards to the current government as we did to previous administrations?

Under President Hakainde Hichilema, questions about political and ethnic divisions remain sensitive. The Church must guard against both tribal prejudice and the perception that its positions are influenced by political or ethnic loyalties.

This does not mean that criticism of the President or his government amounts to tribalism. Legitimate criticism must never be dismissed on that basis. Equally, the Church must ensure that its moral voice is not compromised by partisan interests.

Tribalism is a sin, wherever it manifests itself. Those entrusted with preaching against it must lead by example.

The pulpit must not become a political platform

Concerns about presidential term limits deserve serious discussion. But such discussions must be grounded in verified information rather than speculation about political intentions.

When political disagreements overshadow the Word of God, we risk losing sight of the purpose of worship.

The pulpit should neither become a platform for partisan opposition nor an instrument of government propaganda. It must remain a place from which the Gospel is proclaimed, injustice is challenged and reconciliation is encouraged.

Our priests and bishops must also demonstrate among themselves the unity and fraternity they preach to their congregations.

We cannot preach reconciliation while allowing political differences to divide us.

A word to fellow Catholics

Let us stop demonising politicians and treating them as though they are the only sinners in Zambia. Let us stop using the pulpit and pastoral letters as weapons against those whose political views differ from our own.

No political party has a monopoly on righteousness.

If we disagree with a politician, let us engage them respectfully. If we have concerns about a priest, let us raise them through the appropriate Church structures. If we disagree with a pastoral letter, let us communicate our concerns to the bishops with facts and respect.

We should not encourage political commentators to assume the role of ecclesiastical authorities simply because their views align with ours.

Bishops, priests and lay Catholics are called to promote love – love for the poor and the rich, the opposition and the ruling party, and every person who walks through the doors of our churches.

We stand with Fr. Mwiila. We stand with our bishops in their mission to teach the truth in charity. And we stand with every politician who comes to Church to pray, whether from the PF, UPND or any other political party.

This does not mean shielding politicians from accountability. It means recognising that political accountability and Christian fellowship can coexist.

To Mr Mwamba, we say: respect the administrative structures of the Catholic Church.

To our fellow Catholics, we say: reject political hatred and return to the teachings of Christ.

The Church must remain the Church. The altar must remain the altar. And the doors of our churches must remain open to all, regardless of political affiliation, tribe, language or region.

The altar belongs to God, not to any political party.

The author is a concerned Catholic.

EDITORIAL

Forty more MPs, broken roads: Is Zambia getting value for money?

This week, we turn our attention to one of Zambia's most uncomfortable debates - the introduction of MPs elected under the proportional representation system.

Proponents argue that expanding parliamenthas made it more inclusive. But at a time when communities are struggling with deteriorating roads and other pressing needs, taxpayers have every reason to ask whether the additional representation is delivering value for money.

Imagine being a resident of Chama, where travelling to a hospital, transporting agricultural produce or reaching a market can become an ordeal because of the poor state of the roads.

For years, residents have waited for improvements to the Chama–Matumbo and Chama–Lundazi roads, vital economic lifelines connecting communities to markets and essential services. Parliament has heard their concerns, and government officials have acknowledged funding constraints. Yet the roads remain in poor condition, continuing to disrupt livelihoods and make everyday travel difficult.

Now consider another development.

Following constitutional changes, Zambia has introduced 40 parliamentary seats under the proportional representation system, bringing more MPs into the national assembly at a time when the country is struggling to meet many of its basic development needs.

This invites an uncomfortable but necessary question: Does Zambia need these additional MPs, and what value are taxpayers getting from them?

The 40 seats were introduced under the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act No. 13 of 2025. Twenty are reserved for women, 15 for youths and five for persons with disabilities.

The constitutional changes also increased the number of constituency MPs from 156 to 226. Unlike constituency MPs, who are directly elected by voters to represent specific geographical areas, proportional representation MPs enter Parliament through political party lists, with seats allocated according to the votes received by qualifying parties' presidential candidates.

The intention is understandable.

For decades, women, young people and persons with disabilities have faced obstacles to political representation. The new arrangement creates an opportunity for their voices to be heard in the country's highest law-making institution.

But representation comes at a cost.

Every additional MP places demands on public resources through remuneration, allowances, parliamentary operations and other entitlements.

Those costs must be considered alongside competing national priorities.

In Chama, money is needed to repair roads. Elsewhere, communities need functioning health facilities, medicines, classrooms, clean water and reliable public infrastructure.

These are not abstract budgetary concerns. They affect how people live, work and survive.

One of the earliest interventions by a proportional representation MP provides an interesting picture of how this new parliamentary platform is being used.

On November 3, Mwato Kabaso, a UPND youth MP elected under proportional representation, raised the removal of presidential term limits during his maiden speech.

His proposal attracted controversy, with ten presidential candidates who contested the August 2026 elections subsequently issuing a joint statement opposing any attempt to abolish the constitutional two-term limit.

Even before parliament began its substantive business, another proportional representation MP, Florence Chileshe Chama, had publicly expressed support for President Hakainde Hichilema remaining in office beyond 2031.

Both interventions concerned the future of the presidency.

There is nothing inherently improper about MPs discussing constitutional reform. The Constitution belongs to all Zambians, and parliamentarians have a legitimate role in debating its provisions.

But the interventions invite scrutiny of the priorities being advanced by representatives whose seats were specifically created to improve the representation of women, youths and persons with disabilities.

For young Zambians struggling to find employment, women facing barriers to economic opportunities and persons with disabilities seeking accessible public services, what practical difference will these additional parliamentary voices make?

That question cannot be answered by examining two MPs alone. But their interventions offer an early opportunity to ask what the new system is intended to achieve.

The issue is not whether women, young people and persons with disabilities deserve representation. They unquestionably deserve an effective voice in national decision-making.

The question is whether creating additional parliamentary seats is delivering the intended results, and whether the benefits justify the expenditure.

An MP's contribution should not be measured simply by attendance in parliament or the number of speeches delivered.

Parliamentarians are expected to scrutinise government spending, examine legislation, participate in committees and hold ministers accountable.

For MPs elected under proportional representation, the challenge is particularly important.

They do not represent a single constituency in the traditional sense. Their mandate is linked to groups whose concerns cut across the country.

A woman in Chama, a young person in Shangombo or a person with a disability in Kasama should therefore be able to identify how this additional representation is advancing issues that matter to them.

Are these MPs bringing neglected concerns into parliamentary debates? Are they influencing legislation and budget priorities? Are they questioning government decisions and pressing for better services?

Or has proportional representation simply become another route through which political parties increase their numbers in Parliament? These are legitimate questions, not arguments against inclusion.

Before Zambians can make an informed judgment, parliament should provide a clear account of the financial implications of its expansion.
How much does it cost annually to support the 40 proportional representation MPs?

What is the additional expenditure on salaries, allowances, administrative support and parliamentary operations?

EDITORIAL

Forty more MPs, broken roads: Is Zambia getting value for money?
cont..

How does that compare with the funding required to address urgent public needs?

The comparison must be fair. Roads are capital projects, while parliamentary expenditure is largely recurrent. Savings from reducing parliamentary costs would not necessarily be sufficient to finance major road rehabilitation. Nevertheless, taxpayers are entitled to understand the choices being made with public money.

The proportional representation system is still new. It would be premature to judge its success solely on the first few weeks of parliamentary activity.

But that is precisely why accountability should begin now.

The 40 MPs have an opportunity to demonstrate that their presence is making Parliament more responsive, more inclusive and more effective.

Their performance should be assessed through their participation in committees, contributions to legislation, scrutiny of public expenditure and efforts to address the concerns of the groups they are intended to represent.

Political parties, too, should explain how they selected their representatives and what standards of performance they expect from them.

Zambia should not have to choose between inclusive representation and functioning roads. Both are legitimate public priorities.

But when resources are limited, every public institution must demonstrate that the money allocated to it serves a clear purpose.

For the people of Chama still waiting for better roads, the question is ultimately about results.

If Zambia is spending more to have a bigger parliament, is that Parliament doing more to improve the lives of ordinary citizens?

Six Hours of Doubt

When Zambia's electoral commission suspended vote counting for six hours, 23-year-old Natasha Mulenga began questioning the process. An EU election observation report later documented a deterioration in transparency after counting resumed, raising questions about the decision and the safeguards that followed.

By James Mwape | Radio Icengelo

For Natasha Mulenga, 27, voting in Zambia's 2026 general elections was supposed to be a moment of pride. It was her first opportunity to participate in choosing the country's leaders, an experience she had looked forward to.

But the excitement of casting her first ballot soon turned into anxiety. As Zambians waited for election results, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) ordered a nationwide six-hour suspension of vote counting and the declaration of results at polling stations and totalling centres.

For Ms Mulenga, the announcement raised troubling questions about what was happening to the votes that had already been cast, including her own.

"They gave us anxiety. We were living in fear at that particular moment," she recalled.

Ms Mulenga's fears were not evidence that her vote had been tampered with. But an independent assessment of the election would later reveal problems with the transparency of the results process.

In its final report on Zambia's 13 August 2026 general elections, the European Union Election Observation Mission documented a deterioration in results tabulation procedures following a nationwide six-hour suspension ordered by ECZ.

The mission reported that observers witnessed reduced public scrutiny at totalling centres after the interruption.

What should have been a memorable introduction to democratic participation instead left Ms Mulenga questioning whether her vote mattered.

"My confidence was really affected in a way because, come on, how do I even vote? Because meaning my vote won't even be necessary, looking at what happened last time in the just ended elections," she said.

A report by Radio Icengelo examined the circumstances surrounding the suspension, drawing on interviews with voters, electoral stakeholders and observations made at polling stations in Ndola.

The report found that the interruption had raised questions about the legal basis for the directive, transparency in the counting process and the ability of election authorities to maintain public confidence.

However, the ECZ had not responded to questions submitted by the investigation team by the time the original report was prepared for publication.

The EU mission's findings have added further questions for the commission.

Beyond explaining the circumstances that prompted the suspension, the ECZ needs to clarify why some results tabulation procedures became less transparent after the interruption.

A first vote overshadowed by uncertainty

For Ms Mulenga, the significance of the election went beyond the political contest between candidates.

Voting for the first time meant exercising a constitutional right and participating in a process intended to give citizens a say in how their country is governed.

She expected the counting and announcement of results to proceed without unexplained interruptions. Instead, she found herself waiting for answers.

"It should have run through smoothly, not what they (ECZ) did," she said.

"I would really want to know why they did that."

Her questions are central to understanding the effect of the suspension on public trust. The interruption did not, in itself, establish that votes were altered or that election results were compromised. But the uncertainty surrounding the decision left Ms Mulenga doubting the process.

Her experience experience illustrates what can happen when voters do not understand why an important stage of an election has been interrupted. She was not alone in finding the events unusual.

Six decades of voting, a different experience

At 84, Eli Chisanga Kayula has witnessed Zambia's electoral history unfold since independence in 1964.

He says he has voted in every election since then, witnessing changes in political leadership and the country's electoral system.

But the six-hour suspension of vote counting during the 2026 general elections stood out to him.

"In all my years of voting since 1964, I have never seen or heard of vote counting being stopped halfway across the entire country," Mr Kayula said. "I have never witnessed such hostility surrounding the electoral process until this election."

Unlike Ms Mulenga, who was voting for the first time, Mr Kayula had more than six decades of electoral experience against which to compare the events.

Both generations were confronted with questions about the interruption. Their accounts raise a wider

Six Hours of Doubt cont...

issue: whether the electoral system had provided voters with sufficient information to understand the suspension and the measures taken to protect the integrity of the process.

Confusion at polling stations

While Ms Mulenga and Mr Kayula were waiting for election results, Radio Icengelo reporter James Mwapi was documenting challenges at polling stations in Chifubu Constituency in Ndola.

Voting was generally peaceful at the stations he visited, but his observations revealed difficulties that affected some voters' ability to navigate the process.

At some polling stations, voters struggled to locate their designated polling streams. Some approached the reporter for assistance, apparently mistaking him for an election official.

The difficulties were particularly noticeable among voters who could not read.

At one polling station, the reporter observed a queue that appeared to have stopped moving. When he asked the presiding officer what measures were being taken to address the delay, the official declined to comment.

At Kalela polling station, the confusion was acknowledged by a presiding officer, Laskey Musoka.

"The issue is we haven't indicated where the voter is supposed to come. So we are doing it now. So this has brought this confusion," Mr Musoka explained.

Although these incidents were observed at individual polling stations and cannot be taken as evidence of nationwide failures, they raise questions about election-day preparedness and the provision of information to voters. They also highlight the importance of effective communication during an election, particularly when unexpected problems arise.

Lusaka-based political analyst and former lecturer in governance and African politics at the University of Zambia Dr Neo Simtanyi believes shortcomings identified during elections must be acknowledged and addressed to prevent their recurrence.

But while the difficulties at polling stations affected the voting experience, the subsequent suspension raised a more central question about who had the authority to interrupt the counting process.

Who had the authority to suspend counting?

The reported six-hour suspension has become a central issue in questions surrounding the administration of the 2026 elections.

The suspension was reportedly linked to incidents of violence in some parts of the country.

However, Mike Mushanga, vice president of the Foundation for Democratic Process (FODEP), questioned whether those circumstances justified suspending the process more widely.

"Of course, the explanation was weak to an extent that it refers to pockets of violence in certain areas," Mr Mushanga said in an interview wity Radio Icengelo.

He also questioned the legal authority under which the ECZ acted.

"But if you look at the law that mandates the presiding officer to stop an election, it talks about a specific event, and that is the mandate of the presiding officer," he said. "The Electoral Commission of Zambia took that mandate, which is ironic."

Mr Mushanga's interpretation raises a distinction between the authority of presiding officers to respond to incidents at individual polling stations and the powers of the Electoral Commission to issue broader instructions.

He argued that the decision created uncertainty in the electoral process.

"It led to a situation where it created a gap in the electoral process, which we are yet to fully understand as to why this was necessary. And if it was unnecessary," he said.

The EU Election Observation Mission also questioned the explanation provided for the suspension.

In its final report, the mission stated: "While suspension was lifted after six-hours, the scale of security concerns stated to underpin the decision was insufficiently explained."

The ECZ had reportedly cited violence against polling staff and alleged theft of ballot boxes as reasons for interrupting the process.

What changed after the six-hour suspension?

The suspension did more than delay the announcement of election results. According to European Union election observers, the transparency of results tabulation deteriorated after counting resumed.

In its final report on Zambia's 13 August 2026 general elections, the EU Election Observation Mission documented procedural weaknesses at totalling centres following the interruption.

The mission deployed 100 observers and monitored different stages of the electoral process, including results tabulation at 64 of the country's 226 constituency totalling centres.

Before the suspension, EU observers assessed results tabulation positively in 93% of their observations.

However, after the ECZ lifted the suspension late on 14 August, observers reported a significant deterioration in procedures.

The proportion of observed tabulation processes assessed as bad or very bad for transparency increased from 7% before the suspension to 12% afterwards.

The mission also found that results were not immediately recorded on tally sheets after their announcement in 42% of observations following the suspension, compared with 30% beforehand.

Checks to ensure that figures entered into the digital results management system matched those on tally sheets also declined. Before the suspension, such checks were recorded in 100% of observations, falling to 81% afterwards.

The observers further reported extended breaks during tabulation in almost half of their observations, with returning officers appearing to wait for instructions before announcing results.

According to the mission, a heavy military presence at totalling centres following the suspension was reportedly intimidating to many of those interviewed and contributed to fewer party agents and citizen observers being present.

These findings raise questions about the consistency of procedures used to verify results and the level of independent scrutiny permitted after counting resumed.

The EU mission did not observe proceedings during the six-hour suspension itself. Its findings therefore cannot establish what happened to election materials during that period or whether any results were altered.

Nevertheless, the deterioration documented after counting resumed raises questions about how the ECZ managed the interruption and ensured that electoral procedures were followed.

The mission recommended stronger transparency safeguards, including the projection of results during data entry and the prompt online publication of complete polling-station-level results.

For first-time voters such as Ms Mulenga, the findings add significance to concerns about

EDITORIAL

Forty more MPs, broken roads: Is Zambia getting value for money? cont..

whether the electoral process was sufficiently transparent.

Electoral Commission asked to explain

Radio Icengelo sought clarification from the ECZ about the suspension.

The station asked why counting and the declaration of results had been interrupted, what informed the decision and how the commission responded to concerns raised by electoral stakeholders.

The commission was also asked to address questions surrounding its authority to issue the directive.

By the time the report was prepared for publication, the ECZ had not responded.

The EU mission's findings have added further questions for the commission.

Beyond explaining the circumstances that prompted the suspension, the ECZ needs to clarify why some results tabulation procedures became less transparent after the interruption.

The mission's observations also raise questions about whether election officials received adequate instructions when the process resumed and what oversight mechanisms were used to ensure compliance with established procedures.

The commission also needs to explain what measures were taken to address the weaknesses documented by observers.

Without these answers, it remains difficult to establish whether the problems were isolated procedural failures or reflected broader weaknesses in the management of results.

A first-time voter left searching for answers

When Ms Mulenga cast her first ballot, she expected to participate in a process in which every vote would be counted and the results transparently declared.

Instead, the six-hour interruption left her questioning the reliability of the system.

The EU mission's findings have given added significance to the concerns she expressed after the suspension.

The observers documented reduced transparency and inconsistencies in results tabulation procedures after counting resumed. They also questioned whether the security concerns cited to justify the nationwide interruption had been sufficiently explained.

None of these findings proves that Ms Mulenga's vote, or anyone else's, was altered.

But they raise questions that the ECZ has yet to fully answer in this investigation.

For Ms Mulenga, who entered a polling station for the first time believing that her vote would help shape the country's future, the experience has left a lingering doubt.

"I would really want to know why they did that," she said.

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HOUSE BUSINESS



MakanDay's weekly look inside Zambia's National Assembly — what MPs said, what they did, how they voted and why it matters to you.

What can MPs say in their maiden speeches?

Deputy Speaker Malungo Chisangano's intervention during Mpika North MP Francis Kapyanga's first address brings into focus the rules governing maiden speeches, particularly the distinction between introducing oneself and engaging in parliamentary debate.

By Gibson Zulu

What is a member of parliament (MP) allowed to say when addressing the national assembly for the first time? Can an MP raise controversial political issues, or must the speech be limited to personal introductions and constituency priorities?

These questions came into focus on Tuesday, November 24, when Deputy Speaker Malungo Chisangano interrupted the maiden speech of Mr Kapyanga, the National Reconciliation Party for Unity and Prosperity (NRPUP) for Mpika North.

A maiden speech is the first formal speech delivered by a newly elected MP in the house. It traditionally provides an opportunity for the MP to introduce themselves, acknowledge their constituents and outline the issues they intend to champion during their term.

The term maiden comes from Old English and, in this context, refers to something being done for the first time.

In Zambia, the rules governing maiden speeches apply to backbenchers. A backbencher is an MP who does not hold a ministerial position.

Backbenchers include opposition MPs, independent MPs and governing-party MPs who are not ministers.

Unlike ministers, whose responsibilities include executing government policies, backbenchers play an important role in scrutinising government decisions, questioning ministers and representing the concerns of their constituents.

What happened in parliament?

During his maiden speech, Mr Kapyanga paid tribute to the late Mutotwe Kafwaya, a former Minister of Transport and Communications and Lunte MP in Patriotic Front-led government, who was shot dead on August 14, during a joint security operation at the Kabulonga residence of opposition presidential candidate Brian Mundubile in Lusaka, a day after the general elections.

"In a free Republic, the ballot must never cost a citizen their blood," Mr Kapyanga told the House.

He also raised concerns about the 2026 general elections, arguing that they had left deep political tensions and questions about the treatment of opposition members.

He called for national dialogue, reconciliation and justice.

However, the speaker intervened, directing Mr Kapyanga to concentrate on introducing himself and explaining what he intended to do for the people of Mpika North, rather than discussing the elections.

The intervention brought into focus the distinction between delivering a maiden speech and participating in parliamentary debate.

What do the Standing Orders say?

Standing Order 76 of the National Assembly Standing Orders, 2026, sets out three requirements governing maiden speeches.

First, a backbencher cannot participate in debate in the house before delivering a maiden speech.

Second, other MPs are prohibited from interrupting a member delivering a maiden speech.

Third, a maiden speech must not exceed eight minutes.

However, the provision does not expressly prescribe the subjects an MP may address or define precisely when remarks made during a maiden speech amount to parliamentary debate.

This distinction matters because an MP introducing their priorities may naturally refer to national issues, government policies or political developments affecting their constituents.

For example, an MP representing a constituency struggling with poor roads may criticise the government's handling of infrastructure projects while explaining what they intend to pursue in parliament.

Would such criticism constitute debate, or would it form part of outlining the MP's priorities?

Standing Order 72 provides broader guidance on the content of parliamentary speeches, including restrictions on imputing improper motives to members and making certain references to people who cannot defend themselves in the house.

However, it does not expressly settle the distinction between introducing an issue during a maiden speech and debating it.

Why does this matter?

The speaker's intervention raises a broader question about how parliamentary rules are interpreted and applied.

Presiding officers have a responsibility to maintain order and ensure that MPs follow parliamentary procedures.

At the same time, maiden speeches provide newly elected representatives with an important opportunity to communicate their priorities to the nation.

The question arising from Mr Kapyanga's interrupted address is therefore not simply whether an MP must follow the rules, but how those rules distinguish between introducing political concerns and engaging in debate.

For voters, that distinction matters because a maiden speech is often their first opportunity to hear how their newly elected representative intends to speak for them in parliament.

From the Bulletin & Record Archives

When prayer became a matter of state

This week, we return to November 2015, when Zambia was debating an unusual intervention in the country's economic and political troubles: a presidential call for a national day of prayer and fasting.

Then-President Edgar Lungu had declared October 18 a day of national prayer and fasting in response to the social and economic challenges facing the country. The declaration drew support from some church leaders, but it also triggered a wider debate about where religion ends and the responsibility of government begins.

Among the strongest voices in that debate was Archbishop Telesphore Mpundu, then president of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, who argued that prayer could not substitute for practical solutions to the country's economic problems. University lecturer Phineas Bbaala and satirist Roy Clarke, writing as Kalaki, raised similar questions from different perspectives.

More than a decade later, both President Lungu and Archbishop Mpundu have died. But the questions at the heart of this November 2015 Bulletin & Record story remain strikingly familiar: What place should religion occupy in public affairs, and when a country faces economic problems, where should prayer end and policy begin?

As Archbishop Mpundu put it at the time, in a memorable analogy: "You pray first and foremost, then you go to UTH."

'You pray first and foremost, then you go to UTH'

By Charles Mafa

God has was kept busy in Zambia last month, since President Lungu declared 18 October a day of prayer and fasting. By issuing this religious decision, the president moved from a secular to a spiritual leader, and the podium of the House of Representatives from whence his statement was issued, became a pulpit.

Politics and religion do mix occasionally, sometimes uneasily. University lecturer and political analyst, Phineas Bbaala, pointed out that "religion is not just about praying, preaching or fasting. The major objective of religion is to transform our behaviour." Prior to the prayers, the late Dr Roland Msiska, then Secretary to the Cabinet, ordered the suspension of all public forms of entertainment "during the period when Zambians dedicate the day as a solemn fast in response to the social and economic challenges."

The Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ) backed the day of prayer through a pastoral letter issued by its president, Rev. Alfred Kalembo. He, however, cautioned against the continued antagonism of citizens by the state if the day of prayer was to bear fruit.

Said Mr Bbaala: "People should exercise the freedom of worship. I should be free to believe in something or not to believe….praying is the lazy man's first choice, isn't it? It is easier to turn to God when things are bad. But when things are okay, usually people don't care about God." Satirist Roy Clarke, who writes under the pseudonym Kalaki, asked on social media, "Did we elect Lungu as president to lead the government or to lead the nation in prayer? Don't we have archbishops for that?"

And said Archbishop Telesphore Mpundu, president of the Zambia Episcopal Conference: "We don't receive orders from the president on when we should pray or not pray. It is okay for the president to say look, we need some prayers. We're asking our churches to pray for us. We can get organised ourselves. But not to tell us that this is the time for you to fast. No. Only the Pope has that authority. We do not take kindly instructions of that kind because in that rhythm, it is us who are the masters. We're doing something but in our own way."

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Phineas Bbaala found it "quite strange that we should rush into prayer before we can take any meaningful action to try and resolve our national problems". What the country is going through was "created by man and can only be solved by man".

He continued: "It is only a fool who thinks that come 19th October then all the problems the country is facing will be a thing of the past. That is foolishness. I'm not trying to be a prophet of doom but I stand to be challenged if, after 19th October, the kwacha will have tremendously gained because of prayer; mealie meal prices would have come down because of prayer; if the demand for copper would have gone up because of prayer, if by-elections would have come to an end because of prayer," he said.

The Archbishop says the government is contending with an economic problem which needs an economic solution. "The problems that we have, we take them to God but that does not absorb us from using our God-given intelligence to tackle this problem. We can't just wait and say God is going to solve the problems for us."

Catholic Bishops have in the past denounced poor management of public resources, by-elections motivated by greed, political violence, unequal distribution of resources and high youth unemployment. There are some critics now who think the Church has "gone to sleep because they have eaten too much from government".

Said Archbishop Mpundu: "People have a right to go and vote and no one has the right to tell them what political party to vote for. It is not true when you say the church has been too silent because it has eaten too much. These are careless statements,

From the Bulletin & Record Archives

'You pray first and foremost, then you go to UTH' cont...

which are coming from people who do not know where they are because they don't know where we come from. You want to know the present, study the past. We were the only voice. We wanted people to have a voice, now they have a voice, but they're still waiting for us to speak.

He said that if he told people to vote out President Lungu next year because his performance has not been good, they "will tell me go to heaven. Christians don't have to listen to me. It is a political issue," says the Archbishop. "Even if I say vote for UPND or MMD to come back, the fact of saying that President Lungu has failed now, I am saying vote for someone else. Now, this is being partisan. I am not partisan and the Catholic Church is not partisan."

Mr Bbaala points out that philosopher Karl Marx said religion is the opiate of the masses. Faith is serious but it is trivialised when it's toted too readily and stridently into the political arena. "Those in leadership have tried to use religion in order to perpetuate their stay in power and actually to oppress their followers without the followers noticing."

Despite the influence the Catholic Church has in the country with its more than 3.5 million followers, Archbishop Mpundu says "We have never sat as a conference to assess the performance of one particular leader. What we can say is that the people of Zambia put them where they are. Not me. It is up to the people of Zambia to assess them.

"We in the Catholic Church are so proud of the diversity of political opinions in our country. That is how it should be. So, anyone who stands up and says go and vote for this, especially from the pulpit is wrong. The people have a right to reject him. We're there to pass moral judgment on the performance of any institution – whether it is government or not. We say look, the performance can be judged from the results. We're not going anywhere, this institution is just wasting people's time. It is not putting value to people's lives.

The belief that an appeal to faith has a calming influence on the public is working in Zambia. But the leadership of the Catholic Church has repeatedly opposed the declaration of Zambia as Christian nation. "I am telling you... I still tell you, I'm very contemptuous of those people who say Zambia is a Christian nation. So, Christianity is now a state religion? No. It's not. We want Zambia to be a secular state. Secular state doesn't mean it is devoid of religious values. It is. But whether anyone belongs to a religion or not to any religion at all as a Zambian, they're welcome."

Roy Clarke's alter ego Kalaki followed up with another posting: "Rather than calling for national prayers for economic recovery, Lungu might instead consider appointing a competent Minister of Finance." That view is echoed by UNZA's Mr Bbaala, who believes the head of state should have called for a national indaba, which would be more productive than this event where people will be praying and fasting. In Africa, we have a unique way of solving problems. Even in the villages, when there is a problem, people come together to consult one another and come up with a solution."

As for Archbishop Mpundu: "This is a national (economic) issue. It is above partisan politics. How do we get out of this quagmire? Those who are in administration, they should take the lead to do that. You're suffering from a disease which is communicable: you pray first, yes, but first and foremost go to the UTH."

