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Human Rights Commission

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PRESS RELEASE
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HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION RELEASES 2026 GENERAL ELECTION MONITORING REPORT, CALLS FOR STRONGER HUMAN RIGHTS SAFEGUARDS

The Human Rights Commission has released its report on the 2026 General Election and calls for stronger accountability for electoral violence, safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, greater transparency in electoral processes, equitable access to public media, and improved accessibility for persons with disabilities.

The report examines the human rights environment from the pre-election period in 2025 to 30 September 2026 and recommends reforms to strengthen human rights protection throughout the electoral cycle. It assesses the rights to vote and participate in public affairs; freedom of expression, assembly and association; equality and non-discrimination; personal liberty and security; access to information; protection of the law; and access to effective remedies.

The monitoring was conducted under Article 230 of the Constitution of Zambia and the Human Rights Commission Act, No. 4 of 2024, guided by applicable regional and international standards including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections.

Monitoring Approach

The Commission implemented an election preparedness plan, strengthened its Early Warning and Early Response Case Management System, operated an Election Situation Room, and received complaints through its offices, field monitors and toll-free line 8181.

Approximately 175 monitors were deployed to constituency and district totalling centres and the National Results Centre. Commissioners and selected staff were also accredited to monitor polling stations and results centres.

The Commission visited police stations and detention facilities, engaged electoral and law-enforcement authorities, conducted civic education, and carried out verification, mediation, referrals, investigations and follow-up on reported concerns.

The Commission found that voting and counting proceeded in an orderly manner at many locations observed. Electoral officials, security agencies and other stakeholders helped resolve operational challenges, including late opening of some polling stations, shortages of materials and disputes at polling and totalling centres.

Further, the Commission observed limitations in access to certain stages of results verification and aggregation. The suspension of counting and announcement of results from midday to 18:00 hours on 14 August 2026 created an information gap, highlighting the need for timely, accurate and transparent communication by the Electoral Commission of Zambia.

These findings reinforce the need to assess respect for human rights throughout the electoral cycle, including campaigning, polling, counting, results management and the post-election period.

Key Findings

1. **Political Violence and Intolerance**

   The Commission's Case Management System recorded 126 election-related incidents across 12 categories, including 37 incidents of violence, 12 cases categorised as electoral fraud, eight cases of voter intimidation and seven cases of vandalism. Assaults, campaign disruption and destruction of political materials were also recorded or reported.

2. **Arrest, Detention and Access to Justice**

   The Commission monitored cases involving prolonged detention, delayed court appearances and concerns about access to legal representation, family members and medical care.

3. **Access to Courts and Transparency in Results Management**

   The closure of the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, High Court and other court premises on 24 August 2026 raised concerns about access to judicial remedies during a critical period for filing presidential election petitions.

4. Women's Participation

Women remained underrepresented as candidates: 7.1% of presidential candidates, 12.5% of parliamentary candidates, 10.9% of mayoral and council chairperson candidates, and 8.5% of ward councillor candidates. The Commission also received reports of violence against women in elections, including cyberbullying, intimidation, threats and gender-based harassment.

5. Participation of Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities faced barriers including inaccessible facilities and difficulty obtaining appropriate voting assistance, limiting their ability to vote independently and by secret ballot.

6. Access to Public Media and Campaign Opportunities

Monitoring indicated disparities in public media coverage of political actors, despite requirements for fair, balanced and equitable coverage. Concerns were also raised about equitable access to campaign opportunities, including the practical ability of parties to reach voters under the five-day provincial campaign schedule.

Priority Recommendations

1. Government and Parliament should review electoral, public order and criminal procedure laws to strengthen compliance with human rights standards, accountability and access to effective remedies;
2. The Electoral Commission of Zambia should strengthen transparency and timely communication on delimitation, polling, counting, totalling and results management, and adopt a clear crisis-communication protocol for prompt, regular public updates whenever processes are disrupted, delayed or suspended. Any suspension should be necessary, proportionate, time-bound and, where practicable, limited to affected areas;
3. The Electoral Commission of Zambia should conduct accessibility audits of polling and totalling centres and provide reasonable accommodation that preserves voter independence and ballot secrecy;
4. The Zambia Police Service and other law-enforcement agencies should maintain a central, accurate and verifiable custody register and promptly provide authorised persons with information on the location and legal status of detainees;
5. Law-enforcement agencies should ensure prompt access to lawyers, family, medical care and oversight bodies; bring arrested persons before a court without undue delay; and grant police bond where legally appropriate;
6. The Judiciary and National Prosecution Authority should, within their respective mandates, ensure continuity of judicial services and access

to courts during politically sensitive periods. Any safety restrictions should be demonstrably necessary and proportionate;
7. Political parties, candidates and supporters should publicly reject violence, intimidation, hate speech, destruction of campaign materials and interference with electoral processes;
8. Political parties and other stakeholders should promote participation of women, young people and persons with disabilities as candidates and decision-makers, and ensure safe, supportive and non-discriminatory conditions for participation;
9. State-owned and public media should provide fair, balanced and equitable coverage of contestants, consistent with constitutional and electoral obligations, and publish transparent information on allocation of election-related coverage and airtime.

The Commission urges all responsible institutions and stakeholders to implement these recommendations within their respective mandates.

Credible elections depend on protection of citizens' rights throughout the electoral cycle. Every person must be able to participate in public affairs, campaign, access information, express political views, vote and seek effective remedies freely, safely and without discrimination.

In conclusion, the Commission will continue to monitor outstanding election-related human rights concerns, investigate alleged violations within its mandate and engage responsible institutions to secure timely responses, accountability and redress where violations are established.

The full *Report on the Monitoring of the 2026 General Election: Human Rights Before, During and After the General Election Held on 13 August 2026* will be available on the Human Rights Commission website: www.hrc.org.zm.

About the Human Rights Commission

The Human Rights Commission is an independent National Human Rights Institution established under Article 230 of the Constitution of Zambia and operationalised through the Human Rights Commission Act, No. 4 of 2024 and the Access to Information Act, No. 24 of 2023. Its mandate includes promoting and protecting human rights, investigating human rights violations and abuses, monitoring the observance of human rights, and conducting human rights education.

(Original Signed)

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