



**AFRICAN UNION AND THE COMMON MARKET FOR EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION TO THE 13TH AUGUST 2026 GENERAL ELECTION IN
THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA**



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

LUSAKA, 15 AUGUST 2026

A. INTRODUCTION

At the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Zambia, the African Union Commission (AUC), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), , deployed a joint African Union and COMESA Election Observation Mission (AU-COMESA EOM) to observe the 13 August 2026 General Election of the Republic of Zambia.

The AU-COMESA EOM is led by H.E. Hailemariam Dessalegn Boshe, former Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and deputised by H.E. Ambassador Marie-Pierre Lloyd, a member of the COMESA Committee of Elders from Seychelles. The AU and COMESA Preventive Diplomacy Team, led by Hon. Justice Effie Owour, a member of the AU Panel of the Wise, supported the Mission.

The Mission comprised 93 Short-Term Observers (STOs), 52% of whom were women. The observers were drawn from 27 African countries.¹ They included election management body officials, representatives of civil society organisations, election experts, governance and human rights practitioners, youth representatives, legal professionals, diplomats, media experts and gender specialists.

The Mission was deployed in accordance with the relevant African Union instruments governing democratic elections, including the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), the AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), and the African Union Guidelines for Election Observation Missions.

Prior to the deployment of the STO Mission, the AU and COMESA deployed a Pre-Election Assessment Mission (PAM) to Zambia from 4th to 8th May 2026 to assess the state of preparedness for the elections and the broader political, legal and security environment.

Since arriving, the AU – COMESA EOM has engaged with a range of Zambian stakeholders, including the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), government officials, political parties, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, citizen observer networks, development partners, the diplomatic community, and other relevant actors. Through these consultations, the Mission gathered diverse perspectives on the level of preparations, strengthened collaboration and built momentum for a credible process.

The Mission also reviewed the legal framework governing the elections and assessed the political, electoral and security environment in the lead-up to the polls.

¹ Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Saharawi Republic, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Prior to election day, the Mission deployed 33 observer teams across 8 provinces of Zambia, namely Central, Copperbelt, Eastern, Lusaka, Muchinga, North–Western, Southern, and Western. The Mission observed voting procedures in 740 polling stations across 226 constituencies, covering urban and rural areas. Mission observers assessed the final campaign period, opening of polling stations, voting, and closing and counting procedures to assess compliance with national laws and regional and international standards.

This Preliminary Statement is based on the overall assessment of the pre-election period, election day, the close of polls, and the early stages of results tabulation. Recognising that the electoral process is still ongoing, this statement does not constitute the overall or final assessment of the electoral process. The Mission will continue to observe the immediate post-election environment, including the results management process and the resolution of electoral disputes, if any. To further strengthen future electoral processes in Zambia, the Mission will publish its final report, outlining detailed findings, recommendations, and lessons learned.

B. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The following are the main findings of the AU-COMESA EOM:

i. Political Context of the Elections

The Mission noted that Zambia organised the 2026 general elections with a longstanding record of constitutional continuity and peaceful transfer of power. Since independence in 1964, the country has undergone significant political transformation, moving from a multiparty system at independence to one-party rule between 1972 and 1990 under President Kenneth Kaunda. Since then, power has changed hands peacefully through elections on three occasions: 1991, 2011 and 2021.

Fourteen candidates were successfully nominated to contest the presidential election.

On the broader political and economic environment, the Mission noted that Zambia continues to face several macro-economic challenges affecting the cost of living, youth unemployment, and poverty. Furthermore, socio-economic discontent, polarisation and party coalitions were critical factors in the 2026 elections.

ii. Legal Framework and Electoral System

The Mission notes that the 2026 elections were preceded by legal reforms and were conducted under the following frameworks:

1. The Constitution of Zambia, 1991 (amended as of 2025).
2. The Electoral Processes Act, 2026.
3. The Public Order Act, 1955.

The Constitutional Amendment Act No. 13 of 2025 introduced a Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR) electoral system to enhance the inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities. The amendment further created 70 additional constituencies. The Mission commends the introduction of the MMPR system as an affirmative measure to enhance the representation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities. However, the Mission notes with concern that proportional representation seats are allocated based on the national presidential vote. This disadvantages parties or independent candidates who secure votes at the constituency or local level but without a presidential candidate.

The Electoral Processes Act No 12 of 2026, which operationalises the Constitutional Amendment Act 2025, was passed in May 2026, during the week that Parliament was dissolved, and three months before the elections. This reflects a recurring pattern, similar to 2016, when Parliament passed the Electoral Processes Bill shortly before its dissolution. The late enactment of legislative changes raises concerns, including the limited time available for comprehensive civic and voter education on the new legal provisions. Furthermore, the bill's passage contravened best practice, which recommends finalising electoral laws at least six months before a general election.

The AU-COMESA EOM observed the lack of a legal framework to regulate political parties. In April 2026, the Constitutional Court declared the lack of legislation regulating party conduct unconstitutional and unjustifiable and ordered the legislature to enact it within 12 months. Parliament was dissolved in May 2026 without passing a Political Parties law.

iii. Election Management

Ahead of the elections, the ECZ conducted several electoral-related activities, including voter registration, civic and voter education, constituency delimitation, and candidate nominations.

a. Boundary Delimitation and Voter Registration

The Constitution of Zambia provides broad guidelines for delimiting constituency boundaries. The ECZ conducted a boundary delimitation exercise which was concluded on 16 April 2026. The delimitation created 70 new constituencies, bringing the total to 226. The exercise aimed to address long-term disparities in voter distribution and ensure equitable representation, which is consistent with Articles 3 and 17 of ACDEG and para 4.1.2 of the SADC Principles.

While the Constitution provides broad guidelines on delimitation of boundaries, the Mission notes that these provisions were not operationalised in any legislation. As a result, the formula used to delimit constituency boundaries remains unclear. In addition, there were no guidelines specifying when the delimitation report would be published and gazetted. Furthermore, the Mission took note that the delimitation was conducted four months before the August 2026 General Election, leaving limited time for public education on the new constituency boundaries.

b. Voter Registration

The ECZ used a hybrid manual and digital system to register voters and enhance voter registration, especially among the youth. The online pre-registration process allowed eligible voters to access a registration portal to enter their details.

The ECZ registered a total of 8,786,300 voters, of whom 53.1% were female and 46.9% were male. Youth comprised 46.3%, while PWDs comprised 20,162. Of these, 1.5 million were new voters, compared with a projected 3.5 million. This calls for renewed strategies to motivate citizens to participate in shaping their country's democracy. The Mission commends the ECZ's positive steps to disaggregate PWD data in the 2026 voter register as a step towards inclusion.

c. Election funding

The Mission noted that the Government of Zambia provided full funding of an estimated K2.2 billion for the 2026 elections, demonstrating the Government's commitment to the process.

d. Civic and Voter education

The ECZ, in line with its mandate, rolled out a publicity and voter education campaign to ensure that every eligible citizen was informed, empowered, and encouraged to participate meaningfully in the electoral processes. In doing so, ECZ used a multi-channel approach that included community outreach programs, radio and TV programs, social media and digital platforms, door-to-door outreach, and engagements in schools, colleges, and universities, faith-based outreach, market and bus station activation, distribution of voter education materials, and partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

iv. Candidate Nomination

The 14 presidential candidates were validly nominated, including one female (independent) candidate. For the National Assembly, a total of 1,132 candidates were nominated across 226 constituencies, out of which 22.4% were women. Despite the increased number of parliamentary contestants, women remained underrepresented. Stakeholders attributed this to high nomination costs, limited access to campaign financing, patriarchal social norms, and internal political party selection processes that continued to favour male candidates. At the local government level, 2,384 candidates contested 509 council wards, with 17.8% being women.

A substantial number of independent candidates contested, reflecting growing political pluralism. On the other hand, stakeholders stated that the rise in independent candidates could be linked to limited intra-party democracy in the nomination process, as well as dissatisfaction among some aspirants.

Violent incidents were reported during the candidate nomination period in some areas such as Mazabuka District and Kaputa District, resulting in the deaths of two people. Police made several arrests in connection with the incidents.

v. Political Parties and Campaign Processes

The ECZ developed and released a 50-day campaign schedule for the 2026 General Election to prevent campaign clashes. The Mission appreciates the campaign schedule initiative. However, the Mission noted challenges in implementing the schedule, including selective adherence and enforcement.

Opposition political parties raised concerns about frequent police obstruction of opposition campaigns, including a few cases where roadshows and rallies were affected. Violent clashes were recorded during campaigns in Choma and Mazabuka districts in Southern Province and Kaputa in Northern Province.

C. CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

vi. Media Environment

The media remained generally active with a diversity of media outlets covering the elections and providing platforms for political discourse. The Mission received stakeholders' concerns about the arrest and charging of journalists, which restricts freedom of expression. Concerns were further raised about the application of the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act of 2025, citing that it constrained political communication, limited freedom of expression, and contributed to self-censorship among journalists and citizens in general.

vii. Electoral Security

The Mission observed that the overall electoral security was peaceful and conducive for holding the 2026 General Elections. However, the campaign period was marked by isolated incidents of political violence and heightened tensions in some areas such as Kaputa, Lusaka and Mazabuka. Additional concerns included political intolerance, perceived partiality in law enforcement, skewed application of the Public Order Act, and the growing challenge of misinformation and disinformation.

viii. Inclusion and Participation

The Mission commends Zambia for adopting the MMPR system to advance the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) in electoral processes. However, the Electoral Processes Act does not prescribe how political parties should select women, PWDs, and youth candidates for inclusion on party lists for proportional representation seats. This leaves the nomination of party-list candidates largely at the discretion of party leadership. Moreover, no provisions require parties to ensure that their youth and PWD candidate lists include both male and female candidates. This could undermine the effectiveness of the proportional representation system.

While the inclusion measures are commendable, the Mission noted a decrease in the total number of women duly nominated to contest as candidates. Stakeholders reported that political parties were no longer issuing adoption certificates for female candidates, citing the fact that they already have reserved seats under proportional representation. National Assembly female candidates dropped from 21% in 2021 to 12.5% in 2026, even as the total number of candidates increased. The same downward trend is evident at the local government level, where female mayoral and council chairperson candidates fell from 14.7% in 2021 to 10.9% in 2026, and councillor candidates fell from 9.9% in 2021 to 8.5% in 2026.

The AU-COMESA EOM applauds the ECZ for introducing the classification of PWDs on the voter register as part of efforts to provide targeted support. The Mission, however, observed that 20,162 PWDs were captured on the voter register. PWDs constitute an estimated 10.5% of the total population. This disparity suggests that the captured data may have reflected only new registrants, as the ECZ began systematically categorising PWDs during this electoral cycle.

ix. Electoral Justice

Zambia's electoral justice framework provides for both judicial and administrative mechanisms to resolve electoral disputes. The Mission commends the Constitutional Amendment 13 of 2025, which provides for the Constitutional Court to hear and determine a presidential election petition within 14 days of its filing. The Mission also commends the

Judiciary of Zambia for establishing an Advisory Committee on Elections in 2023 to address electoral disputes.

The Mission observed that the ECZ convened Conflict Management Committees at the national and district levels, comprising stakeholders such as religious leaders, CSOs, Government ministries, and political parties.

Overall, the Mission is of the view that Zambia has established a structured framework for resolving electoral disputes, cascaded to the district level; however, its effectiveness largely depends on timely, consistent, and impartial implementation.

D. ELECTION DAY FINDINGS

a. Opening

The Mission observed that polling stations generally opened in an orderly manner, with 66% of the stations visited opening on time, down from 89% during the Mission's 2021 assessment. Late opening was due to late arrivals of polling officials and election materials, as well as inadequate preparation. The Mission observed compliance with opening procedures.

Polling stations had an average of six polling officials, with women constituting 63%, down from 68% in 2021. Polling stations were accessible to voters, including persons with disabilities, in 81% of stations visited. However, some polling stations had accessibility challenges.

The polling environment was peaceful during opening, with queues observed in 81% of polling stations visited. Security measures were in place in all polling stations observed, and security officials were professional.

b. Voting

The Mission observed that voting was conducted in a generally peaceful and orderly environment in 98.6% of the polling stations visited. Security measures were in place in all polling stations observed, and security officials generally conducted themselves professionally.

The Mission noted transparency throughout the voting process in the polling stations visited. Party agents, observers and media representatives were present. Polling officials demonstrated compliance with electoral procedures, as shown by the correct sealing of ballot boxes in 99% of polling stations visited, voter identification verified against the voter register,

and voters' thumbs marked with indelible ink in all stations observed. These measures helped safeguard the integrity of the vote. Polling stations were accessible to voters, including persons with physical disabilities, in 85% of stations visited. However, accessibility remained challenging in 15% of polling stations, mainly due to uneven ground or stations located upstairs.

The Mission observed sustained voter engagement throughout the day, with queues present in 83% of polling stations visited. However, observers reported that voting was interrupted in five polling stations because voters protested the slow process. Additionally, polling officials also received complaints in 39 polling stations, representing 5% of stations visited, primarily about slow voter processing. The Mission observed that, at most polling stations serving more than 900 registered voters, only one voting booth was provided. This contributed to prolonged queues and delays in voting and raised concerns regarding the time taken to exercise the right to vote. While voting proceeded smoothly in 98% of polling stations visited, observers noted operational challenges in managing voter queues in a few stations. Some polling stations were also too small for the number of voters they were required to serve. This contributed to long queues, congestion and delays in the voting process.

c. Closing and Counting

During the closing and counting period, the Mission made the following observation: (a) Where polling stations opened late, polling officials extended voting hours to compensate for lost time. (b) Party agents, observers and media representatives were generally present and able to observe closing and counting procedures without restriction. Their presence provided an important safeguard for the integrity of closing and counting procedures. While extending voting hours enabled voters affected by late opening to exercise their right to vote, it also created operational challenges. (c) Slow closing procedures delayed counting and the announcement of results at the polling station. Observers also reported fatigue among polling officials. In some polling stations, limited lighting during the late hours created additional challenges for completing closing and counting procedures.

E. Tabulation and announcement of results

On 14 August, the ECZ temporarily suspended the counting and announcing of results, citing security concerns. The opposition leader, Brian Mundubile, publicly claimed victory before the ECZ could announce results. These developments contributed to increased mistrust, political tension, and incidents of violence.

The Mission underscores that the integrity of the results management process depends on strict adherence to the legal framework, transparent communication by the electoral management body, and restraint by all political actors from making premature declarations. Ensuring that only the ECZ announces official election results remains essential for maintaining public confidence and preserving electoral integrity.

F. COMMENDABLE PRACTICES

The Mission identified several commendable practices that contributed positively to the conduct of the elections;

- The Government's provision of full funding for the 2026 elections, demonstrating national ownership and commitment to the electoral process.
- The introduction of Mixed Member Proportional Representation as an affirmative measure intended to enhance the representation of women, youth and persons with disabilities.
- The commitment by citizens to participate in the electoral process, demonstrated by high voter turnout from the early hours of election day, despite the cold weather and long queues at some polling stations.
- The ECZ's efforts to classify persons with disabilities on the voter register as a step towards more targeted electoral inclusion.
- The provision of copies of the voters' register to candidate agents, enabling them to independently check and verify voters and enhancing transparency in the voter-verification process.
- The establishment of an advisory committee on elections to address matters relating to election disputes.
- Zambian citizens in prisons were also permitted to exercise their right to vote.

G. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) Conclusion

Overall, the Mission commends the people of Zambia for exercising their democratic right. The Mission urges all stakeholders to remain calm, exercise restraint, refrain from acts or statements that could heighten tensions, allow the ECZ to complete the counting and verification, announce the results, and use established legal and institutional mechanisms to resolve any electoral disputes peacefully.

(b) Recommendations

With the electoral process still ongoing, the AU-COMESA EOM offers the following preliminary recommendations:

The Government of Zambia

- Ensure an enabling environment prevails during elections by urgently undertaking measures to address underlying causes of tension and politically motivated violence that limit constitutionally guaranteed freedoms and rights.

The Legislature

- Ensure that electoral and constitutional reforms are undertaken through broad-based consultations and that electoral legislation is enacted sufficiently in advance of elections, to allow adequate implementation, stakeholder preparation and civic and voter education.
- The AUEOM reiterate its 2016 and 2021 recommendations on the need to enact enabling legislation to give effect to constitutional provisions for political party funding and campaign finance accountability.
- Review the application of the Public Order Act and other legislation affecting civic and political rights to ensure that they are implemented consistently with the Constitution and Zambia's regional and international obligations on the freedoms of assembly, association and expression.
- Develop a clear legal framework governing constituency delimitation, including objective criteria, population quotas with permissible variances, and statutory timelines for publication and public consultation.

The Electoral Commission of Zambia

- Increase the number of polling stations to accommodate the growing electorate, to improve accessibility and reduce congestion
- Increase the number of polling booths to a minimum of three in line with the number of registered voters and consider the use of more efficient voter-verification mechanisms to reduce delays and congestion.
- Consider using a single voter verification document to speed up voter processing at the polling station.
- Conduct post-election evaluation to assess the conduct of the 2026 general election
- To establish what worked and what did not work as planned to determine the way forward for the next election cycle.
- Increase partnerships with other stakeholders to provide targeted voter education to enhance youth participation in the electoral process.
- ECZ should consider adopting Biometric Voter identification system to reduce the slow voting process.

Political Parties

- Strengthen internal party democracy by ensuring transparent, competitive and inclusive candidate selection processes.
- Refrain from inflammatory rhetoric, political violence and intimidation, and promote issue-based campaigns that foster peaceful political competition.
- Channel electoral-related disputes through appropriate mechanisms provided by the law.

Civil Society Organisations

- Continue civic and voter education initiatives, particularly targeting women, youth, first-time voters and persons with disabilities.
- Continue engaging with state institutions and political actors to promote accountability, inclusion and democratic reforms drawn from recommendations from domestic observers and monitors and election observation missions.

The Media

- Adhere to the Electoral Code of Conduct and ensure balanced, accurate, impartial, and equitable coverage of all political contestants throughout the electoral cycle.
- The Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation should provide equitable airtime and coverage to all candidates in accordance with Article 50 of the Constitution, which guarantees fair access to publicly owned media during elections, and in line with regional and international standards requiring balanced and impartial media coverage to ensure a level electoral playing field.

-END-