



LAUNCH STATEMENT

BY

**HONOURABLE SAMUEL B. TEMBENU
HEAD OF THE SADC ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION
TO THE 2026 GENERAL ELECTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
ZAMBIA**

LUSAKA

6 AUGUST 2026

Distinguished Members of the SADC Organ Troika;

Distinguished Representatives of the Government of the Republic of Zambia;

Professor Kula Theletsane, Director of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Affairs and Representative of His Excellency, Mr. Elias Magosi, the Executive Secretary of SADC;

Chairperson and Representatives and Members of the Electoral Commission of Zambia

Distinguished Representatives of International Electoral Observation Missions;

Your Excellencies, Heads and Representatives of the Diplomatic Missions Accredited to the Republic of Zambia;

Members of the SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC);

SADC Election Observers;

Representatives of Local Election Observers;

Religious Leaders and Members of the Civil Society;

Members of the Media;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Representing His Excellency, Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi and Chair of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence, and Security Cooperation, I am delighted to welcome you to the official launch of the SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM) for the upcoming 13th August 2026 General Election in Zambia.

The Government of Zambia invited SADC to observe the General Election as early as December 2025. This prompt invitation allowed SADC to prepare adequately for the observation, and we commend this proactive approach, encouraging other SADC Member States to follow suit.

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Typically, the SEOM begins with a formal launch event, like today's gathering. This isn't just a ceremonial occasion for slogans or diplomatic talk. Instead, it serves as a platform to inform citizens and the global community about our goals and efforts in strengthening democracy within the SADC region, especially in upholding the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. While we also use this event to show our presence and readiness to engage with stakeholders, it further emphasizes our shared stance against undemocratic practices.

The SEOM conducts election observations in SADC Member States in line with the objectives of the Treaty Establishing SADC and the SADC Protocol on Politics, Defence, and Security Co-operation. It follows the Revised SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021). As many predecessors have noted, these Principles and Guidelines offer a scientific and objective approach to election observation, aiming to strengthen democracy in the region. They do so by promoting best electoral practices and highlighting any shortcomings for review by the SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government.

The Principles and Guidelines are guided by important instruments from the African Union (AU), including the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, as well as relevant United Nations (UN) Conventions. All SADC Member States have reaffirmed their commitment to applying these Principles and Guidelines.

Our engagement is ongoing and not limited to just before elections, as SADC maintains continuous contact with its Member States throughout their electoral cycles. Before deploying the SEOM, the SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC) would have already conducted post-election reviews to evaluate the implementation of earlier SEOM recommendations. In preparation for the current SEOM, SEAC held extensive consultations with stakeholders in Lusaka in May, mainly to advise the Ministerial Committee of the Organ on whether Zambia's environment was suitable for peaceful elections. To ensure continuity, SEAC remains part of the SEOM structure, providing advisory support throughout the process.

The SEOM maintains an open-door policy. Therefore, I encourage all stakeholders to follow up on recent engagements and participate actively in our mission, both in Lusaka and beyond, during the pre-election phase starting tomorrow, 7th August 2026.

I have also been informed that the SADC Secretariat engaged a cross-section of Zambian stakeholders in intensive training to prepare them for deployment to SEOMs in other SADC Member States. Although this training was costly, the Government of Zambia has consistently supported it.

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our mission acknowledges the efforts behind reviewing and amending Zambia's Constitution and electoral laws, especially following the post-2021 general election.

The SEOM will evaluate the national electoral legal framework's content and application to ensure alignment with the principles outlined in the revised SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, including:

1. Full participation of the citizens in the democratic and development processes;
2. Enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms such as freedom of association, assembly and expression;

3. Observance of the provisions of relevant legal frameworks in relation to the date or period of elections;
4. Measures to prevent corruption, bribery, favouritism, political violence, intimidation and intolerance;
5. Equal opportunity for all political parties to access the State Media as well as access to information by all citizens;
6. Respect for values of electoral justice such as integrity, impartiality and fairness;
7. No undue restraints against the opportunity to exercise the right to vote and be voted for;
8. Independence of the Judiciary and impartiality of the electoral institutions;
9. Capacitation and empowerment of citizens through civic and voter education;
10. Acceptance of and respect for the election results by candidates and political parties as proclaimed to have been free, fair, transparent, credible and peaceful, by the competent and Independent Electoral Commission in accordance with the law of the land; and
11. Provision of electoral justice through expedient settlement of electoral disputes as provided for in the law.

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The scrupulous adherence of the Member State holding elections to the relevant provisions of the *SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections* is at the core of the SEOM mandate.

We are therefore here to assess and evaluate the following, amongst others:

- (i) whether the legal and constitutional framework guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and human rights.
- (ii) the structure and model of the electoral system, the Electoral Management Body (EMB), the Electoral Act and regulations and the nature of civil and political rights; and economic, social and cultural rights.
- (iii) the establishment, process of appointment and retention of members of EMBs; in addition to assessing the composition, status, independence, impartiality, professionalism and preparedness of the EMB for the election.
- (iv) the SEOM shall ensure that the delimitation of election boundaries was done in a manner acceptable to stakeholders, and whether the factors that prompted delimitation were in accordance with the laws of the land.
- (v) Whether the delimitation process was undertaken in accordance with the national law and without undue exclusion of particular groups or political interests.
- (vi) The procedures for nomination and provision of reasonable time frames to allow political parties and candidates to comply with the requirements of the registration process.
- (vii) The existence of a Code of Conduct governing all political parties and candidates.
- (viii) The neutrality of the security forces in providing election security; and the existence of requisite special voting facilities for security forces to enable them to cast their votes.
- (ix) The requirements and practices regarding direct and indirect access to the mass media for political parties, candidates, supporters and the general public;

- (x) The requirements and practices concerning reporting by state controlled, public and private media about political parties, candidates and supporters or opponents.
- (xi) The capacity and quality of civic and voter education programmes to afford all prospective voters accurate, comprehensible and adequate information upon which to make electoral choices.
- (xii) The extent to which the process enjoys the trust of the electorate, including inclusiveness, accuracy, and transparency, and whether the electorate are able to own and identify with the process.
- (xiii) The appropriateness of locations of polling stations, and adequacy and accessibility of their facilities;
- (xiv) The production and distribution to polling stations and storage of ballots and other sensitive election materials;
- (xv) The conduct of voting, including assistance to voters, counting, tabulation and announcement of results; the transparency of procedures and adequacy of safeguards against inaccuracies; and
- (xvi) The conduct of procedures and processes concerning electoral complaints and challenges by citizens, prospective voters, and those seeking election, including the provision of effective remedies for violations of electoral-related rights.

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Without the support of other Member States, the SEOM would certainly fail. I wish to salute SADC Member States, who in the two decades since the adoption of the *Principles and Guidelines*, have unfailingly kept providing their support to ensure the deployment of SEOM to fellow Member States. The only hiatus in the deployment of the SEOM was five years ago when the citizens of the Republics of Malawi and

Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania bravely participated in their general elections in the context of the devastating Covid-19 pandemic. Even then, SADC remained intensively engaged with electoral stakeholders in all three Member States before, during, and after their elections.

It is important to recognize that the SEOM deployment is a costly effort that requires our observers and mission support teams to be away from their families and offices for several weeks. The primary goal of SEOM justifies this significant investment, and we are deeply grateful to Member States for their support. Abandoning this initiative is never an option, as it remains a crucial pillar in promoting democracy and good governance throughout the SADC region, especially in pursuit of our SADC Vision 2050.

It is in this context that I am pleased to inform you that the SADC Electoral Observation Mission to the 13th August 2026 General Election in the Republic of Zambia consists of **106** personnel. They are drawn from 10 SADC Member States, **namely, the Kingdoms of Eswatini and Lesotho, and the Republics of Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and the United Republic of Tanzania.**

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the electoral process, our observers will be stationed across all ten provinces of Zambia. The SEOM observation will cover the pre-election, election, and post-election phases, including campaigning, voting day, and ballot counting.

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I want to urge all registered voters to exercise their civic and political rights by voting on August 13, 2026. I also strongly encourage everyone involved and the general public to conduct peaceful and calm elections, avoiding any violations of human rights or electoral rules. I especially appeal to our young citizens to resist being used as tools for political violence or intimidation and to help the SADC Region foster a culture of peaceful, free, fair, and transparent elections. May these elections truly reflect the democratic maturity of Zambia.

I would like to invite everyone to attend the release of our Preliminary Statement on the General Election observations, scheduled for 15th August 2026 at 10:00 AM, at this venue.

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, His Excellency Prof Arthur Peter Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi, I am honored to officially launch the SADC Electoral Observation Mission for the 2026 General Election in Zambia.

Zikomo Kwambiri

Thank You Very Much

Merci Beaucoup

Muito Obrigada

Asante Sana