

Zambia National Women's Lobby

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PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ZNWL STATEMENT ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE 2026 GENERAL ELECTIONS.

The Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL) promotes women's participation across the electoral cycle – before, during and after elections - to address the gender gap in the democratic governance process in Zambia. In the 13th August 2026 General Elections, the organisation has trained and deployed Two Hundred and Seventy (270) monitors in selected districts in the country to assess women's participation and the gender responsiveness of the voting process.

In the pre-election period, the ZNWL monitored the candidate nomination and campaign process. During the nomination process, ZNWL received several reports from various districts of intimidation, harassment and manipulation of the political party adoption and nomination processes targeting aspiring women candidates. The aspiring women candidates were being subjected to threats, political intimidation, withholding of adoption certificates, unexplained disappearance of documents, and deliberate exclusion from participation despite following established party procedures and meeting all required obligations.

Particularly alarming were incidents where female candidates were reportedly been asked to withdraw from filling their nominations to pave way for male candidates and in some instances been threatened by male opponents and political party cadres, thereby creating insecurity among women candidates. In other instances, women who paid all required adoption and nomination fees and participated in official party processes allegedly had their adoption certificates withheld or reassigned without transparency or due process.

In the campaign period, incidences of Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE) were recorded in form of physical, psychological and online harassment. Songs targeting particular women candidates were composed and widely circulated and played in the target constituencies. In some instances, competing candidates questioned the moral standing of female competitors, all meant to discourage their participation as candidates.

These acts undermine women's constitutional right to participate freely and fairly in political leadership and democratic processes. Such actions not only discourage women from contesting leadership positions but also weaken democratic governance, political accountability, and inclusive representation.

It is also worth noting that VAWE contributed to few women being candidates for the elections. There is only one (1) female presidential candidate (independent) out of the 14 validly nominated presidential candidates while there are only three female running mates compared to 11 males. Of the Nine Hundred and Seventy-Three (973) adopted parliamentary candidates, only One Hundred and Twenty -Two (122) (13%) are female while Eight Hundred and Fifty-one (851) (87%) are male. For the Four Hundred and Eight-Seven (487) mayoral candidates, only Forty-Eight (48) (11%) are female while Four Hundred and Thirty-Nine (439) (89%) are male. Of the Five Thousand and Ninety-Nine (5,099) adopted councillors, Four Hundred and Thirty-Three (433) (8%) are women compared to Four Thousand Six Hundred and Sixty-Six (4,666) (92%) men. Among the Three Hundred and Fifty-Four (354) independent parliamentary candidates, there are Thirty-Seven (37) (10%) women and Three Hundred and Seventeen (317) (90%) men.

The overall number of women candidates across the four electable positions has dropped by 25% from Eight Hundred and Eight (808) in the 2021 elections to Six Hundred and Four (604) in 2026. Women's representation in parliament and local government is likely to drop after the elections despite the Twenty (20) proportional seats for women in parliament and those at councillor level.

Therefore, as Zambians vote on 13th August 2026, there is need for various stakeholders to reflect on the commitments the country has signed regarding women's participation in national governance for 50/50 gender representation. We encourage all women candidates and community members to report incidents of intimidation, threats, harassment, and electoral malpractice on the poll day to ensure they are addressed.

ZNWL will document and disseminate findings from the monitoring exercise and further engage various stakeholders on the recommendations for further strengthening of gender responsiveness in the electoral system.

Issued by: Daisy Nkhata Ng'ambi
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