**Statement on Uncontested Elections and the Need to Safeguard Competitive Democracy in Zambia**
***For Immediate Release***

***04 November 2026***

The Christian Churches Monitoring Group (CCMG) is concerned by the emerging trend of parliamentary contests being concluded without voters casting ballots due to the withdrawal of competing candidates. While Zambia's electoral laws provide for the declaration of a candidate elected where only one validly nominated candidate remains, CCMG cautions that repeated uncontested elections raise important questions regarding political competition, voter choice and the conditions necessary for a healthy multiparty democracy.

A credible democratic process requires more than the administration of elections according to legal procedures. It requires that citizens have a genuine opportunity to choose between competing candidates and political alternatives, and that all candidates are able to participate freely without fear, intimidation or undue pressure. Where candidates withdraw from electoral contests under circumstances that raise concerns about the political environment, the credibility of democratic competition may be affected, even where the withdrawal process complies with existing legal provisions.

Recent developments demonstrate the importance of this issue. In Lumezi North Constituency in Eastern Province, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) declared the UPND candidate elected after competing candidates withdrew, resulting in the candidate being decided without a poll. Similarly, in Mandevu Constituency in Lusaka Province, a parliamentary by-election scheduled for 5 November 2026 will not proceed following the withdrawal of all three competing candidates, leaving the UPND candidate as the only validly nominated candidate. The ECZ subsequently announced that the remaining candidate would be declared elected without a poll in accordance with the law.

CCMG recognizes that candidates may withdraw from elections for a variety of reasons, including personal, political or institutional considerations. However, CCMG is concerned by allegations that some candidates in Mandevu experienced persistent harassment, intimidation and pressure prior to their withdrawal. These allegations, which have been publicly raised by political actors, require impartial investigation by the relevant authorities to establish the facts and ensure accountability where wrongdoing is found.

CCMG is further concerned that public statements suggesting that intimidating or "scaring" political opponents is an acceptable part of political competition risks undermining the principles of peaceful democratic participation. Political competition in a democracy should be based on the strength of ideas, policies and public support and not fear, coercion or the restriction of political space.

The increasing occurrence of uncontested elections requires broader reflection among all stakeholders. While the law permits candidates to be declared elected where no other candidate remains in the race, repeated instances of uncontested elections may weaken citizens' confidence that elections provide a meaningful opportunity to choose their representatives.

CCMG therefore calls upon all stakeholders to take urgent steps to protect political pluralism and ensure that electoral competition remains open, inclusive and genuinely competitive. CCMG further makes the following recommendations to key stakeholders:

- **Government and State Institutions:** Government should strengthen safeguards to ensure that all citizens, candidates and political parties are able to participate in elections freely and without intimidation, harassment or undue interference. Allegations of threats, violence or obstruction of political participation should be investigated impartially regardless of the actors involved.
- **Zambia Police Service:** The Zambia Police Service should ensure that complaints relating to political intimidation, harassment, violence or obstruction of electoral participation are promptly investigated and addressed transparently. Effective and impartial policing is essential to maintaining public confidence in the fairness of the electoral environment.
- **Electoral Commission of Zambia:** The ECZ should review the legal and administrative framework governing candidate withdrawals after nominations to ensure that withdrawals are genuinely voluntary and not influenced by coercion or undue pressure. The ECZ should also establish mechanisms for documenting and responding to complaints relating to candidate withdrawals and publish appropriate information on actions taken.
- **Political Parties:** Political parties and their supporters must respect the rights of all candidates and competing political parties. Political parties should promote peaceful competition, discourage intimidation and ensure that political success is achieved through public engagement, persuasion and support from voters.
- **Parliament and Electoral Reform Stakeholders:** Parliament and relevant stakeholders should consider whether the current legal framework provides sufficient safeguards to protect meaningful electoral choice in circumstances where candidates withdraw after nominations. Any reforms should seek to balance candidates' right to withdraw with citizens' right to participate in genuinely competitive elections.

In conclusion, CCMG reiterates that the strength of democracy is measured not only by whether elections are held, but by whether citizens have meaningful choices and whether political competition takes place in an environment where all participants can engage freely and safely. Zambia's multiparty democracy has been built on the principle that citizens should determine their representatives through open competition and the exercise of their democratic choices. Protecting this principle requires continuous commitment from all stakeholders to ensure that elections remain contests of ideas and policies.

ENDS//

Peter Mwanangombe,



CCMG Program Director.