



JOINT CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS' STATEMENT ON THE USE OF SMS MESSAGES LINKING THE SOCIAL CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME TO VOTING FOR PRESIDENT HAKAINDE HICHILEMA AHEAD OF THE 13TH AUGUST 2026 GENERAL ELECTIONS

31st July 2026

For Immediate Release

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, note with grave concern reports that SMS messages have been sent to members of the public, including registered beneficiaries of the Government's Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programme, urging or suggesting that recipients vote for President Hakainde Hichilema and the ruling United Party for National Development (UPND) in order to protect or continue receiving their Social Cash Transfer benefits, ahead of the 13th August 2026 general election.

We have not ourselves been able to independently verify the source of these messages, and we call on affected beneficiaries and members of the public who have received such messages to preserve copies and forward them to the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), and our organisations, so that the matter can be properly investigated. If confirmed, this conduct amounts to a serious abuse of the incumbency and government position to favour the ruling party in the forthcoming general election, and we condemn it in the strongest terms.

Why This Matters

The Social Cash Transfer programme is a statutory social protection entitlement administered by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services using public funds, for the benefit of the elderly, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable households. It is not, and must never be treated as, the property or campaign resource of any political party or candidate.

Conditioning, or appearing to condition, the continuation of a social protection entitlement on how a beneficiary casts their vote is coercive. It exploits the economic vulnerability of some of the poorest citizens in the country, and it converts a constitutionally and statutorily protected welfare programme into an instrument of electoral inducement. This is compounded where the contact details used to reach beneficiaries appear to derive from a government administrative database compiled for the sole purpose of programme administration.

Where an incumbent administration uses the machinery, data, or beneficiary lists of a government programme to advance a partisan campaign message, this offends the constitutional principle that state resources and institutions must serve all citizens impartially, and it undermines the level electoral playing field to which every candidate and party is entitled under the Constitution and electoral law.

Legal Concerns

If confirmed, this conduct raises serious concerns under the Electoral Process Act No. 35 of 2016, in particular:

Section 83 (Undue Influence), which prohibits threatening a person with disadvantage in order to induce or compel that person to vote, or not to vote, for a particular candidate or political party. A message that ties continued receipt of a benefit to a particular electoral outcome falls squarely within the conduct this section is designed to prevent.

Sections 3(d) and 29, which establish that public officers and public entities must extend equal treatment to all candidates and that no special privilege may be accorded to any political party. Using a government welfare programme's administrative channels to convey a party-political message is inconsistent with this obligation of impartiality.

Depending on how the recipients' contact details were obtained and used, the conduct may also raise concerns under the Data Protection Act No. 3 of 2021, which requires that personal data be processed only for the specific purpose for which it was collected and, generally, only with the data subject's consent; and under the Anti-Corruption Act, 2012, insofar as it may constitute the misuse of a public office for advantage.

We stress that these are legal concerns raised by the conduct as reported, not a finding of guilt against any person; that determination is a matter for the Electoral Commission of Zambia, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and ultimately the courts, following a full investigation of the facts.

Our Calls

- The Electoral Commission of Zambia to urgently investigate the origin and content of these messages and to issue clear public guidance to all candidates and parties

on the impermissibility of linking public welfare programmes to campaign messaging.

- The Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate whether this conduct constitutes a corrupt or illegal practice under the Electoral Process Act and the Anti-Corruption Act.
- The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner to investigate the source of the contact list used and whether beneficiary data was processed and disclosed unlawfully.
- The Government of the Republic of Zambia to issue an unambiguous public assurance that Social Cash Transfer payments and all other social protection entitlements are guaranteed by law, are not conditional on how any citizen votes, and will continue uninterrupted regardless of the outcome of the 13th August 2026 election.
- All political parties and candidates to refrain from using government welfare programmes, beneficiary data, or state resources for campaign purposes.
- The Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA) to investigate the bulk messaging channel used to distribute these messages.
- Members of the public, and Social Cash Transfer beneficiaries in particular, to report any similar messages to the ECZ, the ACC, or our organisations, and to be assured that their entitlements cannot lawfully be taken away on account of how they vote.

We reaffirm our commitment to a peaceful, free, fair, and credible general election on 13th August 2026, and we call on all Zambians to exercise their franchise freely, without fear, coercion, or inducement of any kind.

Signed by:



Linda Kasonde
Executive Director, LCK Freedom Foundation

For and on behalf of:

- 1. ActionAid Zambia**
- 2. ADEG**
- 3. Alliance for Community Action**
- 4. Caritas Zambia**
- 5. Chapter One Foundation**
- 6. Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection**
- 7. LCK Freedom Foundation**
- 8. Transparency International Zambia**
- 9. Zambia Council for Social Development**