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## STATEMENT ON THE DETENTION OF JOURNALIST THANDIZO BANDA

Lusaka, August 25, 2025- The Free Press Initiative (FPI) is concerned with the detention of *The Mast* Kabwe-based journalist, Thandizo Banda, who was held by police for taking a photograph of a vehicle carrying Electoral Commission of Zambia Chairperson, Mrs. Mwangala Zaloumis, during her visit to Chowa Police Station to see her murder-accused daughter.

Mr. Banda was detained for three hours and released after paying an admission of guilt fine for alleged conduct likely to cause a breach of peace, reportedly for using his phone to take the photograph.

This raises concerns about the treatment of media professionals and the misuse of loosely defined offences to restrict legitimate reporting. Admission of guilt fines in such cases bypass proper legal process and pressure individuals into accepting liability where no offence may have been committed. These fines are often paid out of fear rather than true admission and risk reinforcing a culture of intimidation and self-censorship among journalists, who may feel discouraged from reporting on matters of public interest.

Journalists are not bystanders; they serve the public interest. Taking a photograph in a public setting, particularly of a public figure involved in a matter of public concern, is standard journalistic practice. Framing such conduct as likely to cause a breach of peace is not only legally tenuous but undermines the legitimate role of the press. The function of the Fourth Estate is to inform the public, question power, and report without fear. Punishing a journalist for carrying out this role undermines transparency, weakens accountability, and limits democratic participation.

FPI condemns the actions of the police in this matter and calls for stronger commitment — not only from government but also from law enforcement — to respect the rights of journalists and uphold media freedom as guaranteed under Zambia's Constitution. Harassment and intimidation of media practitioners must not be tolerated.

FPI urges the government to review and reform laws surrounding breach of peace, which continue to impede the work of journalists, as seen in the case of Thandizo Banda who was detained for merely doing his job.



Furthermore, FPI calls for stronger solidarity among media practitioners across both public and private media platforms.

As the country moves closer to the 2026 elections, it is vital that the space for free and independent journalism is protected. Journalists must be allowed to carry out their work without fear of detention, interference, or unjustified charges.

Issued by:

Joan Chirwa

Founder-Zambia Free Press Initiative