

African Studies Association Statement on the Cancellation of Passports of Government Critics in Zambia

The African Studies Association (ASA), founded in 1957 in the United States, is the largest membership organization of scholars of Africa. The Association is deeply concerned by reports that Zambian authorities have cancelled the passports of at least six prominent government critics, including historian and academic Dr. Sishuwa Sishuwa, a scholar whose research and public commentary on Zambian politics and democracy are well known within our field.

On 11 September 2026, it was reported that the Zambian government had cancelled the passports of former Zambian Ambassador to Ethiopia and former Permanent Representative to the African Union Emmanuel Mwamba, Senior Lecturer in History at Stellenbosch University Dr. Sishuwa Sishuwa, former opposition Members of Parliament Binwell Mpundu and Emmanuel Jay Banda, former State House Special Assistant Kaizer Zulu, and blogger Lillian Mutambo. [Amnesty International has characterized this action](#) as the arbitrary use of administrative powers to silence dissidents, activists, and political opponents, and has stated that it breaches the right to freedom of movement guaranteed under Article 12 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), to which Zambia is a state party. Amnesty further notes that the cancellations strip these individuals of legal and social identity and risk rendering them de facto stateless.

This action does not occur in isolation. It follows [a documented pattern of shrinking civic space in Zambia](#), including a broader post-election crackdown on dissent, the arbitrary arrest and detention of opposition members and government critics, the use of cyber and defamation laws to criminalize peaceful speech, and a proposed Non-Governmental Organizations Bill that would grant the state sweeping powers over the registration and regulation of civil society. The effective cancellation of RightsCon in Zambia in May 2026 has already been cited by human rights observers as further evidence of this trend.

As scholars of Africa, we value the diversity of approaches to democracy across the continent – a perspective that [Dr. Sishuwa's scholarship](#) embraces. The ASA is dedicated to the promotion of teaching, research, and professional endeavors with respect to Africa with the widest possible freedom of inquiry and dissemination of findings. The Association is particularly troubled by the targeting of Dr. Sishuwa Sishuwa, whose case implicates the academic freedom of scholars to research, write, and speak publicly about African politics without fear of retaliation by the states they study. The use of administrative and immigration powers to restrict the movement of an academic critic sets a troubling precedent, one with direct relevance to the ability of African studies scholars—Zambian and non-Zambian alike—to conduct research, travel for fieldwork and conferences, and engage in public scholarship. The Association stands with its members impacted by increasingly authoritarian administrations infringing on academic freedom in Zambia, the United States, and elsewhere.