



PRESS RELEASE

The EU Election Follow-up Mission urges the Zambian authorities to accelerate electoral reform initiatives well before the 2026 general elections to ensure a level playing field for all contestants in line with Zambia's international and regional commitments.

Lusaka, 1 February 2024,

The European Union has deployed an Election Follow-up Mission (EFM) to Zambia to assess the progress made in the electoral reform process and the implementation status of the 2021 EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) recommendations. The EU EFM is headed by Maria Arena, a Member of the European Parliament and Chief Observer of the 2021 EU EOM.

The EU EFM has met with various interlocutors in the electoral process, including the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), the Government of Zambia and relevant state institutions, political parties, civil society, media representatives, and development partners. On 1 February, the mission organised a roundtable meeting of electoral stakeholders, where participants discussed the progress made so far in implementing the 2021 EU EOM's recommendations and of the way forward for electoral reform.

At a press conference held today in Lusaka, Ms Arena said: *“In the spirit of the strong partnership between the EU and Zambia, we welcome the achievements made so far in implementing some of the 2021 EU EOM recommendations, but urge further action for great progress on legal reform prior to the elections.”* The 2021 EU EOM proposed 22 recommendations, including six to be considered as a priority. Two recommendations related to the enactment of the Access to Information Act and the removal from the Penal Code of the criminal defamation of the President have been implemented.

Ms Maria Arena noted: *“The passing by the National Assembly of the Access to Information Act is a positive step in the right direction. The law has some strong points such as its broad coverage of the legislature and the judiciary and the power of the Human Rights Commission to impose administrative sanctions on officials who fail to respect the law. However, it lacks, among others, a broad definition of information and does not clearly override secrecy provisions in other laws. We look forward to seeing how the law will be implemented.”*

She pointed out that two and a half years before the 2026 general elections, the window of opportunity for comprehensive and effective legal reforms gets narrower and encouraged the government and all electoral stakeholders to accelerate this work. Repealing the Public Order Act, enacting legislation on political parties and revising the legal framework governing the media and ICT sector were highlighted as key to ensure a level playing field to all contestants ahead of the 2026 general elections.

Ms Arena underlined the importance of transparency in the electoral reform process, inclusion, and cooperation of electoral stakeholders with the ECZ, including civil society organisations and observer groups. Concluding the press conference, Ms Arena said: *“The EU and Member States will continue to support electoral reform initiatives in Zambia.”*

A comprehensive final report of the EU Follow-up Mission will be published in the next few months. The full archive of EU election observation reports and recommendations can be found at <http://database.eueom.eu>