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# Zambian government's cancellation of RightsCon 2026 was a blow to digital rights and democracy

3 July 2026

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Joint Statements



*People watch a movie on a computer screen next to an electoral poster with the picture of the incumbent Zambian President Edgar Lungu plastered on a wall, at the City Market in Lusaka, Zambia, 9 August 2021. MARCO LONGARI/AFP via Getty Images*

IFEX was among the signatories calling on the European Union and its Member States to make clear to Zambia that the decision was deeply alarming and risked casting a shadow over EU-Zambia relations.

This statement was originally published on [epd.eu](https://epd.eu) on 3 May 2026.

Just days before RightsCon 2026 was due to open in Lusaka, the Zambian government abruptly cancelled the event, silencing the world's largest annual gathering of the global digital rights community.

EPD, together with some of its members across the European digital rights and democracy community, strongly condemns this decision. The cancellation is not only a logistical disruption for the thousands of participants who had already travelled or were en route to Zambia. It is a political act, one that contradicts the democratic values enshrined in both international human rights law and Zambia's own Constitution, particularly the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

This move does not happen in a vacuum. Civil society worldwide is already under significant strain, facing sweeping funding cuts and legislation designed to shrink civic space. The cancellation of RightsCon adds to a troubling global pattern of repression targeting the very organisations and individuals working to defend fundamental rights.

The timing makes this especially stark. UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day takes place in Lusaka this week — a moment that should celebrate open societies, not one overshadowed by the host

government's suppression of civil society gatherings.

**EPD supports our partners' call on the European Union and its Member States to make clear to Zambia that this decision is deeply alarming and risks casting a shadow over EU-Zambia relations. We also support their call to urge delegates attending World Press Freedom Day in Lusaka today to use that platform to speak out. Finally, we support the call on the Zambian government to fully respect the rights of activists to gather, organise themselves and express themselves in their country or abroad.**

**[Read the full statement](#)**

## **Signatories**

Accountability Lab

Accountability Lab East and Southern Africa

Association of European Journalists in Belgium (AEJ Belgium)

Blueprint for Free Speech

Centre for Democracy and Technology Europe

Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties)

Club de Madrid

Danes je nov dan, Inštitut za druga vprašanja (Slovenia)

Demo Finland

Digitale Gesellschaft (Germany)

DW Akademie (Germany)

European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)

European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL)

European Digital Rights (EDRI)

European Exchange GmbH

Electronic Frontier Finland – EFFi ry

European Partnership for Democracy

European Sex Workers Rights Alliance

Fundación Maldita.es (Spain)

IFEX

IT-Political Association of Denmark (IT-Pol Denmark)

Media Diversity Institute

Media Voice – Media and Communication Educational and Research Center

Metamorphosis Foundation for Internet and Society (North Macedonia)

Mnemonic

Politiscope

Privacy Network (Italy)

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### MISA launches Regional Media Lawyers Network

The RMLN and its Governance Charter were launched on the sidelines of the global commemorations for the 2026 World Press Freedom Day in Lusaka, Zambia, underscoring



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### RightsCon 2026 cancellation is a blow to civil society, free expression and the right to assembly everywhere

Members and partners of IFEX and the Global Forum for Media Development stress that