

Mandate of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism

Ref.: AL ZMB 1/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

5 May 2026

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 55/18.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information I have received concerning disturbing reports of the desecration of the grave and theft of the remains of a woman with albinism in Ngundi village of Chief Nalonge, Senanga District, Western Province, Zambia.

According to the information received:

██████████ a woman with albinism was born in 1980 and died on 3 October 2025. She was laid to rest on 4 October 2025 at a local cemetery in Ngundi village of Chief Nalonge, Senanga District. In the early hours of 8 January 2026, unknown individuals reportedly exhumed her grave and stole her remains. The desecrated grave was discovered by ██████████, the elder brother of the deceased who informed the family/local community.

Prior to her death, ██████████ lived in Ngundi village for years with her family. She reportedly experienced stigma and discrimination as a person with albinism.

Despite efforts by the family and local community to search for the remains, they have still not been found. This has left the family and local community traumatized with lingering fear that other graves of persons with albinism, and indeed living persons with albinism, could be targeted with their body parts more than likely being traded or trafficked.

While efforts by the Zambian Police Service, including visit to the site of the desecrated grave are noted, this incident is not an isolated one. For example, on 14 January 2025, the grave of a woman who died aged 34 and buried in Chilankumo village, was found desecrated when a family member visited the grave for routine laying of flower prayers. Clothing that were believed to have been interned with the deceased woman were reportedly found scattered on the desecrated grave. The remains of the deceased woman could not be found.

Despite modest improvement in law and policy, persons with albinism in Zambia continue to report a pattern of intersecting discrimination and violent attacks, including killings and desecration of graves and human remains. Reports of cross-border trafficking in body parts of persons with albinism

further highlight the sense of impunity of crimes committed against persons with albinism.

I am concerned by the seeming rise in the trade of body parts of persons with albinism, including reports of cross-border trafficking of these parts across the borders of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, often obtained through abduction, violence and killing of persons with albinism. The rise in trafficking of body parts has significantly increased anxiety and vulnerability to persons with albinism, whose lived experiences include a constant state of fear both in their homes and whenever they go out for routine livelihood chores.

Given these concerns, and without prejudging the accuracy of the information received, I would like to express deep concerns over the desecration of the graves of persons with albinism in Zambia in the past year, which are not only an apparent contravention of Zambia's own laws,¹ but also constitute serious human rights concern. Desecration of graves were highlighted in previous communications to your Excellency's Government in 2016 (Zambia: JAL ZMB 1/2016); in 2018 (Zambia: AL ZMB 1/2018); in 2020 (Zambia: JAL ZMB 2/2020) and in 2021 (Zambia: JAL ZMB 4/2021). I am further concerned at the lack of meaningful progress to hold the perpetrators of these violations to account as demanded by the family of the victims and as possible deterrence.

In this regard, I would appreciate receiving assurances from you that the Government of Zambia will ensure a thorough investigation into the alleged desecration of graves and assault on the dignity of the deceased persons with albinism. As persons with albinism continue to face violence and other intersecting forms of discrimination in Zambia, I call on the government to put in place measures to address gaps and structural barriers within existing legal and policy framework, which prevent persons with albinism and their families from effectively accessing justice.

Violations against persons with albinism are serious human rights issues and addressing them requires a multifaceted approach as outlined in your Excellency's Government's 2024 report: "Albinism and Rights in Zambia: An Exploration of Experiences, Sociocultural Conditions and Access to Justice." Such an approach would also complement key protection elements of Zambia's National Action Plan on Albinism, which was launched on 17 April 2026, by the Minister of Community Development and Social Services, while also aligning with the African Union Plan of Action to End Attacks and Other Human Rights Violations Targeting Persons with Albinism in Africa (2021–2031).

It is also worth noting that the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) —of which Zambia is a member—adopted a Declaration on the Protection of Persons with Albinism at its summit in Harare, Zimbabwe on 17 August 2024. The Declaration acknowledges that persons with albinism in the SADC region have faced prejudice and stigmatization, as well as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Through the Declaration, SADC Member States reaffirm their commitment to the principles of nondiscrimination and underline that the situation of

¹ They constitute the crime of Trespassing under the Penal Code Act, as well as the fraudulent removal of body parts in contravention of the Human Tissue Act. In most cases, it will also constitute a violation of the Witchcraft Act as the body parts are used for ritual purposes.

persons with albinism in the SADC region can be addressed by focusing on public education and awareness raising campaigns, effective law enforcement, improved specialized services and bringing to justice perpetrators of violence against persons with albinism.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is my responsibility, under the mandate provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to my attention, I would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide detailed information on, and where available the results of, investigations, medical examinations, and judicial or other inquiries carried out in relation to the above-mentioned case.
3. Please provide information on the measures that have been taken to strengthen protection of persons with albinism including the prevention of abductions, attacks and killings as well as measures to prevent further occurrence of desecration of graves.
4. Please provide any information on steps your Excellency's Government has taken with regards to mechanisms that support the recuperation of victims of albinism attacks ensuring mental, physical integrity and psychosocial support to families of deceased persons whose graves have been desecrated.
5. Please provide an update on the implementation of measures in the SADC Declaration on the Protection of Persons with Albinism, among which are measures to strengthen protection against attacks and assault on the dignity of persons with albinism.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

As persons with albinism continue to face violence and other intersecting forms of discrimination in Zambia, I call on your Excellency's Government to speedily put in place robust, practical and complementing measures and mechanisms, to ensure the full protection of the rights of persons with albinism, including protection of graves of persons with albinism. This would require concerted action, sustained advocacy and closer cooperation with civil society, local communities, and especially neighbouring

States in the context of cross-border trafficking of body parts and remains of deceased persons with albinism.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond
Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, I wish to draw your Excellency's Government's attention to articles 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Zambia acceded on 10 April 1984, and article 10 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified by Zambia on 1 February 2010, which guarantee the right to life and security of person and that no one is to be arbitrarily deprived of the right to life. Furthermore, under the CRPD, States must take all appropriate measures to protect persons with disabilities from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse (article 16), and to protect their integrity on an equal basis with others (article 17).

I further wish to refer your Excellency's Government to article 2(3) ICCPR, which states that ... "Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes (a) To ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity; (b) To ensure that any person claiming such a remedy shall have his right thereto determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy." At this point it is important to note that the Human Rights Committee in its general comment No. 36 has found that "Given the importance of the right to life, States parties must generally refrain from addressing violations of article 6 merely through administrative or disciplinary measures, and a criminal investigation is normally required, which should lead, if enough incriminating evidence is gathered, to a criminal prosecution. Immunities and amnesties provided to perpetrators of intentional killings and to their superiors, and comparable measures leading to de facto or de jure impunity, are, as a rule, incompatible with the duty to respect and ensure the right to life, and to provide victims with an effective remedy."

General comment No. 36 on the right to life further states that the duty to protect the right to life requires States parties to take special measures of protection towards persons in situation of vulnerability whose lives have been placed at particular risk because of specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence. This includes persons with albinism, among other vulnerable groups. States parties must respond urgently and effectively in order to protect individuals who find themselves under a specific threat, by adopting special measures such as the assignment of around-the-clock police protection, the issuance of protection and restraining orders against potential aggressors and, in exceptional cases, and only with the free and informed consent of the threatened individual, protective custody.

General comment No. 36 further reminds States that the duty to protect life also implies that States parties should take appropriate measures to address the general conditions in society that may give rise to direct threats to life or prevent individuals from enjoying their right to life with dignity. States parties should also develop strategic plans for advancing the enjoyment of the right to life, which comprise measures to

fight the stigmatization associated with disabilities and diseases, including {...} harmful practices

States parties must enact a protective legal framework which includes effective criminal prohibitions on all manifestations of violence or incitement to violence that are likely to result in a deprivation of life, including, inter alia, ritual killings and death threats. The criminal sanctions attached to these crimes must be commensurate with their gravity, while remaining compatible with all provisions of the Covenant.

I would like also draw your attention to article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which stresses that ‘all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law’. Additionally, in its general comment No. 31, the Human Rights Committee has observed that there is a positive obligation on States Parties to ensure protection of Covenant rights of individuals against violations by its agents and by private persons or entities. States Parties permitting or failing to take appropriate measures or to exercise due diligence to prevent, punish, investigate and bring perpetrators to justice or redress the harm caused by private persons or entities could give rise to a breach of the Covenant (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, paras. 8 and 18).

Furthermore, according to principle 9 of the Principles of the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, there is an obligation to conduct thorough, prompt and impartial investigation of all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions, including cases where complaints by relatives or other reliable reports suggest unnatural death. The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death which in 2016 updated the original UN Manual on the Effective Prevention of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions of 1991; and the UN Principles on Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (1989), states that an investigation must be a) prompt; b) effective and thorough; c) independent and impartial; and d) transparent.

I would like to remind your Excellency’s Government of the absolute and nonderogable prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, such as defined in the Convention Against Torture, ratified by your Excellency’s Government on 11 June 1996, as well as in article 15 of the CRPD.

In their Concluding Observations addressing the right to life for persons with albinism, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has expressed concern at the different forms of violence perpetrated against persons with albinism, including kidnappings, killings and attacks for the purpose of witchcraft practices, and the absence of measures to protect victims and to prosecute and convict perpetrators. The Committee urged the States where this type of violence was taking place to: (a) Promptly investigate all cases of violence against persons with albinism ensuring that they are appropriately prosecuted and punished; (b) Create shelters and redress services for victims of attacks including healthcare, counseling and free legal aid; and (c) Redouble efforts to raise awareness about the dignity and rights of persons with albinism and ensure the involvement of organizations of persons with albinism in any campaigns aimed at eliminating stigmatization and myths that underpin violence against persons with albinism (CRPD/C/KEN/CO/1 paras. 19 and 20).