

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT BY THE HON. MINISTER OF TECHNOLOGY AND
SCIENCE, MR MUTATI, ON THE NETWORK CHALLENGES IN LUMEZI
PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, INSTALLATION OF COMMUNICATION
TOWERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND PROSPECT OF CUSTOMERS ROAMING
FROM ONE NETWORK TO ANOTHER

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank you for granting me this opportunity to render a Ministerial Statement on the update on the installation of communication towers across the country.

Madam Speaker, from the outset, let me indicate that this statement is being presented in three parts, as follows:

- (a) specific case of network challenges in Lumezi Parliamentary Constituency;
- (b) possibility of national roaming; and
- (c) status of the construction of communication towers countrywide.

Madam Speaker, as indicated above, the statement is also in response to an Urgent Matter without Notice that was raised on Friday, 7th November, 2025, by the hon. Member of Parliament for Lumezi, Mr Lufeyo Ngoma, who expressed concern regarding the status of communication towers in his constituency. The hon. Member stated, and I quote, in part:

“The network has collapsed in half of my constituency. It has now been a couple of days that the people in Chibanda, under Mwanya Chiefdom, and the people of Kazembe, under Chitungulu, cannot communicate with anyone. There is no network. The network provider is ZAMTEL Limited. The people in that area are wondering when they will have network. There is a need to restore the network in those chiefdoms. It has been three weeks since the network disappeared, and they cannot access it.”

Specific Network Challenges in Lumezi Parliamentary Constituency

Madam Speaker, I wish to express my sincere compassion to the affected communities of Shibande under Chief Mwanza Kingdom, Kazembe and Chitungulu. The Government fully understands the inconvenience and disruption caused by the loss of network services in these areas. This is because communication is a vital lifeline for socio-economic and emergency activities, and no citizen should be disconnected for such an extended period.

Madam Speaker, the non-availability of network services in certain parts of Lumezi Parliamentary Constituency and, indeed, other parts of our country are attributed to a number of interrelated factors. Firstly, for a long time, Zambia has relied on hydro power for energy generation. You may recall that Zambia experienced an unprecedented drought in 2023-2024. The first of its kind in recorded history. This resulted in severely low energy output. This has impacted and continues to impact directly the availability of energy to power communication towers. Secondly, as a consequence of low energy output, communication towers are either off or not receiving signal feeds from other towers within the network, thereby causing network isolation and loss of active connectivity. This is precisely the case in some parts of Lumezi where towers are operationally disconnected due to power shortages.

Madam Speaker, to address these challenges comprehensively, the Government, working hand-in-hand with the private sector, will require an investment of approximately US\$280 million to implement backup and alternative energy solutions. These investments will ensure that the communication towers operate optimally and consistently, even when power is constrained. The House may wish to note that:

- (a) the Government is working on a financial solution in the energy backup system and site upgrades, which will result in improved network availability country-wide, including in Lumezi Constituency;
- (b) the private sector has undertaken a proof of concept with twenty towers for a hybrid energy solution, such as fuel-generated power blended with renewable energy sources, complemented by a standby battery system to sustain tower operation in off-grid zones.

The Possibility of Network Roaming

Madam Speaker, I wish to report that a pilot proof of concept on network national roaming is being undertaken. This initiative seeks to enable subscribers from different mobile operators to access network services seamlessly, even in areas where their primary provider has no active coverage. Once the pilot phase is concluded and validated, the framework will be developed to guide nationwide implementation of network national roaming.

Status of Construction of Communication Towers

Madam Speaker, access to reliable, affordable communication services is a cornerstone of socio-economic development, digital inclusion, and national unity. Guided by this principle, the Government, through my ministry, in collaboration with Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA), and other implementing agencies, including co-operating partners, continue to expand the national communication infrastructure footprint. This expansion drive is informed by the 2022 Communication Infrastructure Gap Analysis, which identified the need for 998 additional communication towers to ensure adequate coverage across Zambia's displaced population.

Madam Speaker, one of the major constraints in the past has been inadequate financing for tower construction and maintenance. Reliance on the universal access and service fund alone would have taken us thirty years to achieve full national coverage, given that the fund can only support approximately thirty towers per year. The House may wish to note that the Ministry of Finance and National Planning has now established a dedicated budget line for the construction of towers in the 2026 National Budget. This progressive step will now see the construction of towers being constructed under one Budget line.

Madam Speaker, since 2022, a total of 101 towers have been constructed, while a total of eight remain under construction. Further, the Government has finalised the procurement of eighty communication towers whose construction will soon commence.

Madam Speaker, in addition, under the World Bank-funded Digital Zambia Acceleration Project (DZAP), a grant has been secured for the construction of 300 new towers nationwide. This initiative will significantly reduce communication black spots and strengthen digital inclusion, particularly in rural communities.

Madam Speaker, the private sector, on the other hand, has committed 302 towers of which 127 have been constructed, while twenty-three are under construction. The construction of the remaining 152 has also commenced.

Madam Speaker, let me end by stating that the Government remains committed to addressing connectivity challenges by prioritising alternative power solutions. The Government will continue to collaborate with the private sector players, co-operating partners, and local communities to accelerate the deployment of communication infrastructure across the country.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.