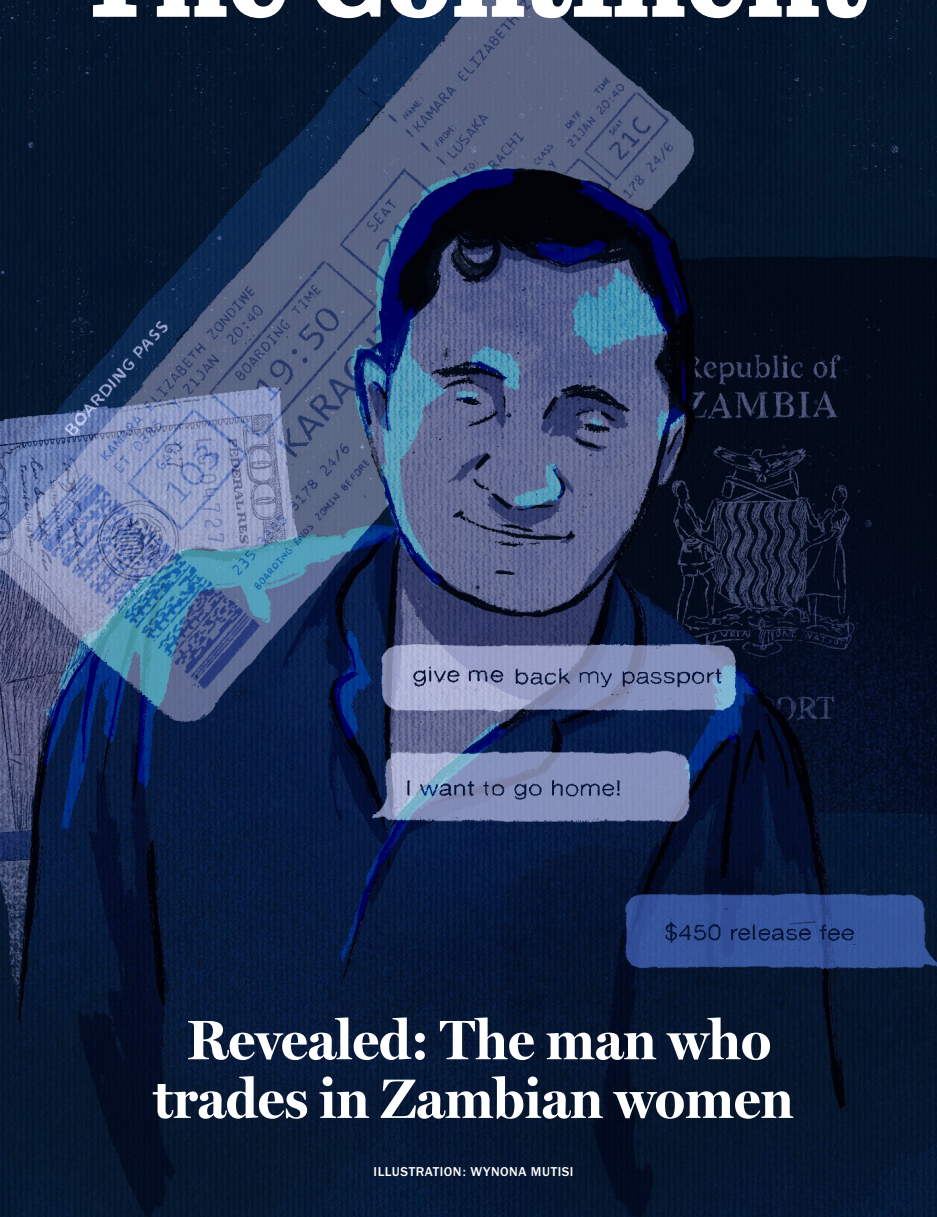


The Continent



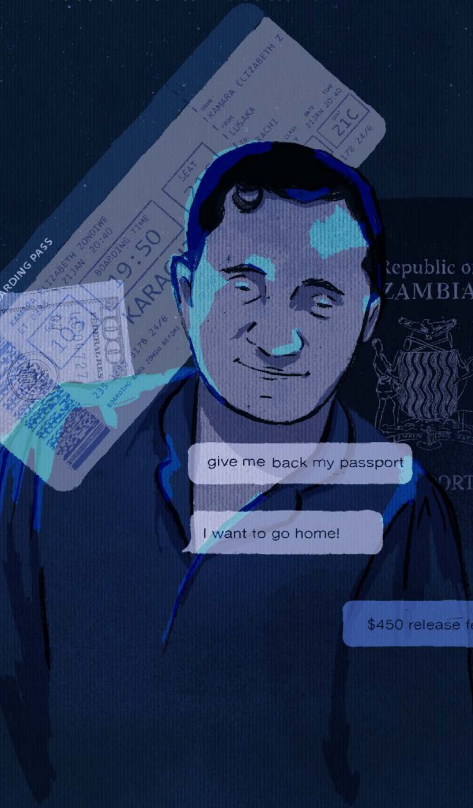
give me back my passport

I want to go home!

\$450 release fee

Revealed: The man who trades in Zambian women

ILLUSTRATION: WYNONA MUTISI



COVER The trafficking of women from the continent to work in abusive homes outside Africa is a well-documented crisis. The brutality they suffer continues unchecked. Yet, the people who do it – like the man uncovered in this week’s investigation – continue to enjoy impunity. Through a network of accomplices in Zambia and Zimbabwe, he moves young women to Pakistan, where they are abandoned into abusive labour. His actions are known to authorities yet he continues to operate freely. (p14)

Inside

- 7 Kenya:** As deputy chief of police steps aside over role in murder, cops brutalise more people
- 8 Belgium:** 65 years later, a trial over the murder of Patrice Lumumba may yet go ahead
- 10 Health:** Big Pharma builds a moat around breakthrough HIV drug
- 12 Botswana:** Gold price surge drives dangerous mining
- 18 Photos:** Displaced Sudanese artists make Kampala home
- 21 Borderlands:** A border that actually works
- 26 Review:** An American hero for a world that no longer exists
- 27 Quiz:** Test how well you know your continent; no pressure to share your score with anyone – unless you want to, of course.

➡ SUBSCRIBE

Get the latest edition of *The Continent*, plus every back issue (all 203 of them) by visiting thecontinent.org. To subscribe (for free!), save *The Continent*'s number to your phone (+27738056068) and send us a message on [WhatsApp](#)/[Signal](#)/[Telegram](#). Or email us: read@thecontinent.org

THE WEEK IN BRIEF



PHOTO: WICKNELL CHIVAYO

Blings of Jo'Burg: Wicknell Chivayo shows off his new pyjamas next to a Rolls-Royce.

ZIMBABWE

Flashy playboy in fishy cancer drug scheme

The Zimbabwean government is under scrutiny over a potential \$400-million deal with a firm linked to controversial businessman Wicknell Chivayo. A leaked document, which officials say is only a draft, suggests the government would pay the firm \$110-million annually over four years for medical drugs and cancer treatment equipment, reports *New Zimbabwe*. TTM Global Medical Exports, which lists Chivayo as director, was registered in November 2024 with its address being a hotel in Sandton, Johannesburg.

GAZA

Soumoud convoy halted

Halted in Sirte, Libya on 12 June, the land convoy of hundreds of people who sought to breach Israel's blockade of Gaza has now fallen back to Misrata. Authorities in eastern Libya who blocked the group after it crossed from Algeria and Tunisia cut off communications, disrupted food supplies, and detained several members, *France24* reports. A separate initiative – the Global March to Gaza – was halted by Egyptian authorities en route to Ismailia, east of Cairo.

NIGERIA

No bra, no exam

Outrage has erupted at Nigeria's Olabisi Onabanjo University after a viral video showed women staff touching students' chests to check if they were wearing bras before entering an exam hall. The university has not commented, but student union president Muizz Olatunji defended the policy as part of a "distraction-free environment," the *BBC* reports. He conceded that alternative enforcement methods were needed. Critics have condemned the practice as archaic and sexist, and equated its enforcement with sexual assault.



Now in its second week, open war between Iran and Israel has escalated to bombing Iranian nuclear sites.

TRAVEL

Half of Africa might be barred from visiting US

The Trump administration could extend its travel restrictions to 25 more African countries, citing visa overstay rates or “deficient” vetting of travellers, according to a cable first reported on by *The Washington Post*. State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce declined to comment on the specifics in the cable. The new list includes traditional United States allies including military collaborators Egypt and Djibouti, as well as Liberia, Nigeria and Ethiopia. In all, citizens of nearly half of African countries might be barred from US travel.

FRANCE

Champagne trafficking isn't sparking migration

Three people and two companies went on trial in France on Thursday over African migrants found living and working in squalid conditions during the 2023 grape harvest in the Champagne region. The nearly 60 workers were mostly from Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire. The accused – the director of subcontractor Anavim and two associates – face charges including human trafficking and endangering workers' health and dignity at a site inspectors described as “dilapidated” and “disgusting”, *RFI* reports.

MALI

Junta judge tightens noose on foreign gold-digger

A Malian judge has placed Barrick Gold's Loulo-Gounkoto complex under provisional administration for six months amid a tax dispute with Mali's military junta. Seeking to raise local revenue as Mali is ostracised by external actors, the government has increased tax pressure on foreign mining firms. It accuses United States-based Barrick Gold, Africa's top gold extractor, of past tax evasion and unfair past contracts, *Reuters* reports, and previously detained its employees and suspended exports



PHOTO: LOULO-GOUNKOTO

Gold hold: The Loulo-Gounkoto mine complex in western Mali, near the Senegal border.

despite ongoing arbitration. Barrick offered \$370-million and condemned the detentions. The company has called Mali's actions unjustified.

UGANDA

Court martial for civilians is a done deal

President Yoweri Museveni has signed a new law allowing civilians to be tried in military courts. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court had ruled such trials unconstitutional but the parliament – dominated by Museveni's political party – passed an amendment mandating legal training for tribunal judges to get around the ruling. Critics say it will be used to impose harsh martial law on government opponents like Kizza Besigye, who is currently charged with treason. Museveni insists it targets armed criminals and ensures national security.

TOGO

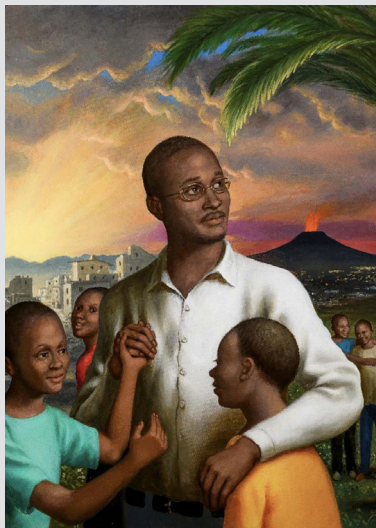
President mutes French broadcasters

President Faure Gnassingbé's government has suspended French state-owned networks *RFI* and *France 24* for three months. Without mentioning specifics, it said they failed to fact-check stories and broadcast biased reports that undermined the state, *Reuters* reports. This comes amid growing criticism of Gnassingbé for an alleged constitutional coup. Under a new constitution where MPs now choose Togo's leader, the president – a position he has held for 20 years – has been reframed as leader of the council of ministers, with no term limits.

TANZANIA

Lissu to represent self as lawyer access denied

Tanzanian opposition leader Tundu Lissu has been granted permission to represent himself in his treason trial after being denied private meetings with his lawyers, *AP* reports. Arrested on 9 April for calling for electoral reforms, Lissu said he has been forced to speak to his legal team via telephone in a monitored room. He has protested against violations of his basic rights in jail, and is being held in a death-row section despite being a pre-trial detainee. His next court date is 1 July.



Protector: This mural of Kositi was painted ahead of his beatification.

DRC

Incorruptible sentry on the path to sainthood

The Vatican has beatified Floribert Bwana Chui Bin Kositi, a Congolese customs officer killed in 2007 for refusing a bribe to allow rancid rice into Goma, which was intended to be distributed to poor people. He was 26 at the time of his murder. The late Pope Francis recognised him as a martyr, fast-tracking his path to sainthood, *AP* reports. He is recognised for embodying the Christian belief in the dignity of every person, especially the poor.

NIGERIA

Night raiders kill 150 in attack on Benue village

The death toll from a weekend attack in Nigeria's Benue state has risen to 150, survivors said this week, as residents continued to search for missing people and recover bodies from burned homes. Gunmen stormed the village of Yelewata, shooting sleeping residents and setting homes ablaze, according to survivors and a local farmers union. Many victims had been sheltering in a market after fleeing earlier violence, *Africanews* reports. No group has claimed responsibility, though such attacks are common amid worsening clashes between herders and farmers over land and water.

NEWS

KENYA

Protests force top cop out as cover-up fails

But police are continuing to shoot protesters, even after the killing of a teacher showed how violent the state can be.

ROBERT AMALEMBA

A WEEK AFTER the brutal killing of teacher and blogger Albert Ojwang in police custody, Deputy Inspector General Eliud Lagat “stepped aside” on Tuesday, bowing to mounting public fury, protests, and allegations of a systemic cover-up.

Ojwang, a schoolteacher arrested at his home in Homa Bay, died two weeks ago after being transferred 400km to Nairobi’s Central Police Station – a move ordered by Lagat, the second highest-ranking officer in the country. Ojwang had allegedly authored a social media post that claimed Lagat was at the centre of a network of police corruption.

What happened next has jolted the nation: the teacher was beaten to death in police custody. And now the junior officers initially blamed for the

murder are flipping their statements – implicating the highest echelons of the police force.

The most damning testimony so far has come from Constable James Mukhwana, who was himself arrested in the wake of the killing, alongside the police chief in charge of the police station and four others. Mukhwana has withdrawn his initial report and now alleges that Ojwang was targeted by four hardened remandees through a chain of command that was “following instructions from DIG Lagat”. He also alleged the police had a prearranged narrative to cover up the incident.

Fearing for his life, Mukhwana has requested witness protection and offered to testify as a state witness.

Senate majority whip Bonny Khalwale told *The Continent* he was baffled by the uneven handling of justice. “How can the man who bears the greatest responsibility still be free while his juniors are in the cells? That paints a terrible picture of our fight against injustice within the police service.”

This week the police responded to protests to demand accountability with lethal force – a man selling face masks in downtown Nairobi was shot in the head at point blank range, and is now fighting for his life in hospital. At least 22 other people were injured, some with gunshot wounds. ■

DRC

Belgium could start a Lumumba trial next year

A former diplomat involved in the plot to murder Lumumba may face trial if a magistrate allows the case to proceed.

KIRI RUPIAH

IN 2022, the only mortal remains of Patrice Lumumba, a single gold-capped tooth, were returned to his family, more than 60 years after his murder.

The first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo was killed in a plot orchestrated by American spies and Belgian officials. Only now are Belgian prosecutors planning to go after anyone for their role in the 1961 killing.

Étienne Davignon, 92, is accused of being involved in the “unlawful detention and transfer” of Lumumba. A magistrate will decide in January 2026 whether he should stand trial.

Lumumba served as the DRC’s first prime minister for less than three months after the country became independent from Belgian colonial rule in 1960. He was removed amid a secessionist crisis in mineral-rich Katanga. Belgium supported the secessionists and sent troops under the pretext of protecting Belgian nationals.

Once removed, Lumumba was beaten

by Belgian and Congolese officials, and executed by firing squad, along with two of his allies: Joseph Okito and Maurice Mpolo. Initially buried in a shallow grave, his body was later exhumed, cut up and dissolved in acid, a disposal overseen by Belgian police commissioner Gerard Soete, who then kept the gold-capped tooth.

Davignon is the only surviving Belgian among 10 once accused of taking part in the events. According to the *Brussels Times*, he was a trainee diplomat at the time and became a vice-chairman of the European Commission in the 1980s.

In 2001, Belgium concluded it bore a moral responsibility for Lumumba’s killing. His son, François, filed a civil case in 2011 accusing Belgium of war crimes, torture, and a conspiracy to remove Lumumba.

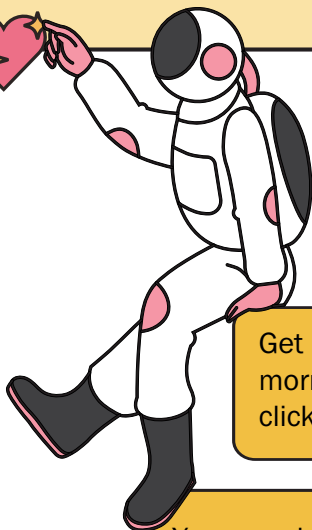
Speaking to Belgian broadcaster *RTBF*, Lumumba’s daughter Juliana welcomed the potential legal action, saying, “We’re moving in the right direction ... what we’re seeking is, first and foremost, the truth.” ■

Love The Continent? We deliver!

Get your weekly fix of the very best African journalism by subscribing (for free!)

"Very informative and uncompromising in reporting and commenting on otherwise unknown aspects of Africa."

As per the Big Annual Survey 2024



Get it every Saturday morning on Whatsapp by clicking [this link](#)

You can also sign up on email (read@thecontinent.org), Signal, or Telegram (+27738056068)

HEALTH

‘Once-in-a-generation’ HIV drug has been approved

But there is always a but. The drug could cost as much as \$28,000 or as little as \$100 – depending on where you get it.

KIRI RUPIAH

THE UNITED STATES Food and Drug Administration has approved injectable lenacapavir for HIV treatment. It’s the closest thing to a vaccine – taken just twice a year, the drug offers near-complete protection from infection.

“This medical breakthrough needs to be widely available, as quickly as possible, reaching at least 10-million people, in order to bend the curve of new infections,” said Asia Russell, the executive director of the Health Global Access Project.

New HIV infections have risen to 5,800 a day after the US government defunded prevention programmes for the communities that face the highest risk, such as LGBTQIA+ people and sex workers.

But at the price lenacapavir was approved, \$28,000 per person a year, the drug’s reach will be limited.

That price is for the US market. Gilead has not disclosed its global pricing for lenacapavir and is reportedly requiring



PHOTO: PHILL MAGAKOE/AFP

Milestone: *Lenacapavir may be prescribed as an oral medication ahead of the injectable doses.*

governments and funders to sign non-disclosure agreements to keep the secrecy.

But activists say it is rumoured to be \$100 per person yearly for the poorest countries. Other countries will be charged using a tiered pricing system.

HIV drugs for the poorest countries are often bought by governments and international aid pools like the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The \$100 price tag is still several times higher than what they currently spend on less effective oral alternatives. With millions of doses to

buy each year, and with foreign aid cuts, these buyers face a choice: continue buying many doses of cheaper but less effective alternatives or buy fewer doses of the new wonder drug. Either route costs lives. Gilead has licensed six other drug makers to make generic versions for restricted distribution to 120 low-income countries, but actual production might take years.

“We can’t have a breakthrough tool that only rich governments can afford, and be told we must wait years before a fairly priced generic becomes possible,” said Fatima Hassan, director of South Africa’s Health Justice Initiative.

Gilead’s list of low-income countries excludes several nations in the Global

South that have high HIV burdens and where the firm tested the drug, such as Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Mexico.

In a statement on Wednesday, five activist organisations asked global health funders and agencies to support governments which may want to use patent opposition and compulsory licensing to loosen Gilead’s price and distribution controls. “Otherwise we will have only a slow drip of supply over the years, with exacerbated deadly inequities,” said Russell.

“We cannot let corporate control and excessive pricing decide who stays HIV-free,” said Susana van der Ploeg of the Brazilian Interdisciplinary Association on Aids. ■



Long-acting: Injectable lenacapavir is administered twice a year.

PHOTO: GILEAD SCIENCES

FEATURE

Gold's deadly glitter

Littered with abandoned gold mines, eastern Botswana is drawing hundreds of informal prospectors as the precious metal's price smashes records.

KELETSO THOBEGA IN FRANCISTOWN

WITH THE PRICE of gold climbing to new records every month, eastern Botswana has become inundated with unlicensed miners who are reopening old mines to scrape for leftovers. They leave behind gaping holes, eroded grasslands and water sources contaminated by the mercury used to extract gold in low cost operations.

Global gold prices have risen nearly 47% in the past 18 months, making prospecting for the precious metal even more attractive.

Formal gold mining used to be big business in Matsiloje village, which lies north of Francistown, Botswana's second city, close to the border with Zimbabwe. But the big gold operation in the area,

Rainbow Mine, closed about a decade ago. Fifty kilometres east of Francistown is the Mupane gold mine, which is also closed. It had re-opened in 2022 but is now under liquidation. Economically desperate people see these mines as a sign the area is rich in gold.

Kitted with metal detectors and basic tools, they dig into abandoned mine holes, private farmlands and homesteads, looking for gold in Matsiloje, Matshelagabedi and some parts of Francistown.

Local police believe many of the unlicensed miners are undocumented Zimbabweans who have crossed over the nearby border. They say only 22 of the 136 unlicensed miners arrested in the past two years were from Botswana, and that most of the others

were Zimbabwean.

One miner, who only spoke to *The Continent* on condition of anonymity, said he holds a Zimbabwean passport and crossed legally into Botswana. Initially, he worked as a lifter and seller for a gold miner but decided to join the mining. “Jobs are few, especially for us foreigners. It is hard to start any business when you don’t have capital.”

He added: “I know it is illegal but it got me good money. We were risking our lives but sometimes you do anything to survive and feed your family.”

The risk is real.

In December 2024, a miner died after being trapped underground. Arrest is even more likely. This year so far, five men have been sentenced to six months in jail for illegal mining.

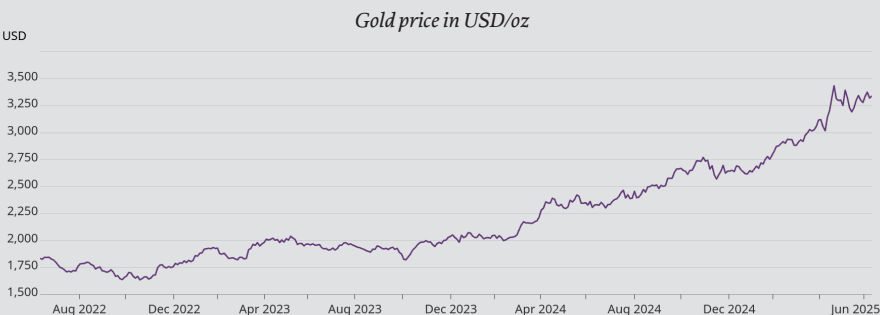
Reckoning with the environmental destruction caused, residents in the area want higher sentences, especially for repeat offenders. Six months, they say, is too light and does little to discourage

repeat offences. “They mined into locals’ farmlands and homesteads leaving big holes on the ground. Some of these men are violent and carry dangerous weapons,” said the Matsiloje village chief, Kgosi Eric Moipolai.

Botswana’s government has sent more police and soldiers to patrol the area. After a visit, Minister of State Presidency Moeti Mohwasa acknowledged the urgent need for sustainable employment opportunities, while Minister of Minerals and Energy Bogolo Kenewendo said the government is considering harsher penalties.

The 2022 attempt to reopen Mupane gold mine offered brief hope for legal mining jobs, which has now fizzled.

“Mupane has faced financial difficulties and ceased operations in March 2024. It is currently under liquidation,” auctioneer John Taylor told *BizCommunity* in May. Taylor is overseeing the sale and said bids were due by last Friday. ■



INVESTIGATION



Unmasked: The man trafficking Zambian women to Pakistan

Women are being lured to work in terrible conditions, then abandoned without their passports or hope of getting home.

And the man responsible is still profiting, despite the authorities knowing about it.

ANNIE ZULU IN LUSAKA

WHEN A FRIEND connected Blessings Banda* to a recruitment agent via WhatsApp, she rejoiced at the prospect of earning a decent living. Three years later, she is stuck in Pakistan with a two-month-old baby, destitute and unsure of when she will return home.

This investigation, which includes undercover reporting, found that the man who hastily arranged her travel – only to confiscate her passport before abandoning her to abusive employers – continues to recruit Zambian women, even though his actions are known to the authorities.

That man, who identified himself to Banda as Jam Hussain, promised safe domestic work in return for a salary of \$300 a month. The statutory minimum for that kind of work in Zambia is just over \$50.

“I thought this was my chance to change my life and give my child a better future,” said Banda. At 22, she had one child back home in the Copperbelt province. In a few weeks she had a passport and Hussain told her to take the bus to Zimbabwe where she could get a visa and plane ticket to Pakistan.

This exploited a loophole in human trafficking oversight. South Asia has long drawn international criticism for mistreating foreign domestic workers. This means more scrutiny. But because Zambia is not seen as a major source of low wage workers to the region, someone coming from there through Zimbabwe to Pakistan doesn’t raise red flags.



PHOTO: CHONA MWEMBA/SA/AP

Home: Juliet Chali was able to return to Zambia in 2023 after a desperate plea on social media.

On the bus to Harare, Banda travelled with two other women recruited by Hussain. He picked her up after arrival in Karachi. It all seemed to be going really well. They went to his home and office.

Then he took her passport.

Shortly after, the two went to Lahore, where she was left in the home of an elderly woman with three children and grandchildren. She was offered a tiny, windowless room with a broken bed and thin blanket and told she was not allowed to leave the house.

Banda said she worked long hours on little food, often surviving on scraps and just three hours of sleep a night. Her employer called her a “dog” and other slurs, and halved her salary to \$150, which she received only once.

When Banda complained to Hussain, he ignored her. When she confronted her employer about the pay, she was thrown out of the home. “I had nowhere to go. I slept outside that night, hungry and cold.

I cried until morning.”

She found a group of stranded Zambian women, some of whom had also been lured in by Hussain. Some had turned to prostitution to survive.

Hussain later placed her with another employer, but the work conditions were even worse. She said she was mocked for her race, sexually harassed by the male employer and even threatened with a gun. Fearing for her life, she left. Since then, she has lived precariously in Lahore for nearly two years. She contacted Hussain on several occasions to ask to return home, but he demanded a “release fee” of \$450.

She then kept falling ill and took pregnancy and HIV tests. Both were positive. Without legal documentation, she couldn’t get ARVs from local hospitals and relies on Septrin, an over-the-counter antibiotic that is often prescribed to people with HIV in Africa to prevent infections like malaria and

pneumonia. Close to her due date in April, Hussain released her passport so that she could get the urgent medical care she needed.

The Zambian embassy in China, which ostensibly covers Pakistan, has recently been in touch about repatriation. Progress is slow and she hasn’t had any financial help. “I want to go home to my family. I don’t want to die here.”

An all-too-common ordeal

In this investigation, we spoke to two other Zambian women in Lahore and Karachi who say they were recruited by the same man. “My boss calls me mad and blames me for things I haven’t done,” said one woman. “I asked Hussain for my passport to go home, but he refused. I’ve lost hope.”

“I am only surviving,” said the other woman, adding that she works long hours, is barely fed, and sleeps on a torn mattress, in a dank, windowless room.

Because Zambia does not have an embassy in Pakistan, women in this situation have turned to social media to get noticed. Two of them, Adolphine Lupasha and Juliet Chali, told this investigation they were recruited by Hussain. They both described trajectories like Banda’s: passport confiscated, pay halved and/or withheld, and horribly abusive employers.

They said Hussain receives lump-sum payments from Pakistani employers, which he uses to fund their travel, keeping what’s left. The employers then justify not paying the women because they paid Hussain upfront.



PHOTO: ADOLPHINE LUPASHA

Trap: Jam Hussain meets Adolphine Lupasha in Karachi in early 2024, before taking her passport.

Zambian authorities know

Chali's very public plea, which led to the International Organization for Migration co-ordinating her return in 2023, should have quickly brought Hussain's actions to the attention of authorities.

But in February 2025, this reporter posed as a single mother seeking work and messaged Hussain. He responded in minutes with a voice note to ask, "who gave you my number?" Satisfied with the response – that a friend's cousin had done the referral – he replied: "Send me your passport fast". No questions were asked about experience.

In March, Zambian authorities intercepted three women recruited by Hussain after the mother of one of them contacted authorities and this investigation. Boris Mulengu, director of Zambia's Anti-Human Trafficking Department, admits there are loopholes in the exit process traffickers can exploit. "People leaving are not necessarily required to show contracts. Many don't say they're going for work." Zambians can travel to Pakistan with an e-visa that can be processed online within 48 hours.

The department said in May – weeks after they were alerted to Banda's plight and other cases – that a committee had been set up to investigate the rise in cases of trafficking women to Asian countries.

The enabling network

Hussain works with Zambian accomplices, known to the women by vague aliases. One, "Mr Ron" in Lusaka, arranged transport through R & R Traveling Consultancy, which is not

on Zambia's business registry. A "Mr Kasonde" housed the women en route to Zimbabwe. Via phone, a "Madam Martha" admitted to connecting girls to Hussain for a commission.

We found no record of Hussain's Al-Hassan Employment Services in the Pakistani business registry. A Facebook page with that name has not been updated since 2017. In a 2019 YouTube video, the agency invites recruits from Zambia and Nigeria, among other countries, to look for "better opportunities". The video was still up at the time of publication.

We gained access to Hussain's restricted personal Facebook page with the help of a trafficking survivor and found more than 10 undated photos of newly arrived Zambian women, taken in his office and at airports.

Contacted via WhatsApp and presented with the details of the claims in this story, Hussain threatened to block the reporter. The Facebook page named Al-Hassan Employment Services – which had 498 followers – was deleted after that interaction. He similarly refused to answer questions from *The Continent's* editor. ■

**Real name concealed for the safety of the woman, who is still in Pakistan*

This investigation was produced by the Southern Africa Accountability Journalism Project (SA | AJP), a project of the Henry Nxumalo Foundation funded by the European Union. The article does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union

PHOTO ESSAY

Life in art, art in refuge

PHOTOS: AMMAR YASSIR

UGANDA has a long-standing open-door policy for the displaced, and now hosts 100,000 Sudanese refugees – even though it doesn't share a border with Sudan. Among them are artists navigating the challenges of displacement in Uganda's capital, Kampala. Here, Ammar Yassir follows

some of these artists in exile. Esraa recently held her first open studio in Uganda. Mahasin balances motherhood and journalism in a land she barely knows. Mohammed Bashir reopened his craft shop. Hamza is homesick. And Aya keeps having to adapt her career to pay the bills. Through it all, they persist, contributing to the fabric of their new – hopefully temporary – home. ■



Aya Sinada studied architecture but started working as a documentary photographer when the war broke out in Sudan. She documented her own displacement journey from Ailafoon, east of Khartoum – but her laptop was stolen, the photos lost. Now she works as a graphic designer in downtown Kampala.



Esraa Rahma, a visual artist and painter, just finished a three-month residency at Afriart Gallery in Kampala. Born and raised in El Gezira, Sudan, she holds a chemical engineering degree, but fled the war in 2024. Her work dwells on human memory and how the war has stolen joy and intimacy from her life.



Hamza Teirab, a multidisciplinary artist, was a teacher in the fine arts department of Al Neelain University. He moved through several cities before arriving in Uganda in 2023. In Kampala, he has put his artistic skills to work, making tote bags, beauty accessories, and murals.



Mohammed Bashir holds a PhD and used to teach at the Sudan University School of Fine Arts. His art is in leather crafts, which has proven handy for refugee life, and has reopened his leather crafts practice in Kampala. “We try to incorporate local patterns, especially since we share many of the same motifs.”



A community of Sudanese people is growing in Bwaise, one of Kampala’s most neglected neighbourhoods. Among them is Mahasin Ahmed, a photojournalist from El Fasher in Darfur. She was in Khartoum when the war began. She fled with her three-year old son, Nawaf, in a days-long journey that ended in Kampala.

FEATURE

Bridging the Zambezi

Kazungula is renowned as one of Africa's most efficient border crossings. Its shiny new bridge spans the river beneath it – and ushers in generational change.



**WORDS AND PHOTOS: JAMES JAMU
IN KAZUNGULA**

EVERY FEW minutes, a truck crosses the 900m span of the Kazungula Bridge – a steel and concrete artery that vaults over the Zambezi River between Zambia and Botswana. Since its opening just four years ago, the bridge has become the heartbeat of trade in southern Africa.

Both opportunity and disruption have followed in its wake.

Before the bridge existed, traffic flowed slowly across the river on unreliable ferries. Trucks waited as long as 12 days to get on a pontoon, and the journey itself took 30 minutes. Now, up to 250 trucks pass through Kazungula town every day, their engines humming with the promise of commerce. They

carry copper, coal, timber, and various consumer goods, all of which are processed quickly through the purpose-built One Stop Border Post.

The town's informal sector thrives in the shadows of the trucks. It is here, in the margins, that people hustle: selling fish, offering tours, weaving mats, or smuggling onions to dodge border fees.

As Moses Liwema, a 30-year-old local who runs Kazungula Border Tours, puts it: "The bridge connects us, yes, but there's more to show than just steel. There's life underneath."

For local communities, the bridge is a symbol of possibility and disruption. It brings jobs, tourists, and new markets, but also stirs the dust of cultural erosion and environmental strain.

Migration, both legal and undocumented, is stitched into everyday life here. Kazungula is home to peasant farmers, cross-border traders,

and migrants from all directions – some chasing dreams, others outrunning collapse.

Pontoon blues

The \$259-million bridge and border post development brought order and speed, but not without loss. Ignatius Milimo knows this better than most. His first job after finishing school in 1980 was on the old pontoon ferry, and he worked there until he retired in 2008.

When construction began on the new bridge, the government claimed his family's land. The place where his house stood – where his children played, and where memory lived – were quietly dismantled to make space for progress.

Before the bridge, Kazungula moved at a much slower pace. The pontoon ferry frequently malfunctioned. Its American design depended on spare parts from Cape Town, which were often



Cross purposes: Construction on the Kazungula bridge and border post was completed in 2021.



***Clockwise from
above left:***

New homes for those displaced by the new facilities are already falling into disrepair.

Kazungula's local entrepreneurs hope you enjoy your retirement.

Fisherman in rough canoes still make their own way across.

delayed, leading to breakdowns and service suspensions that caused traffic chaos and lengthy border delays.

The ferry's 70-tonne capacity was often exceeded, straining the pontoons and leading to safety hazards. In 2003, an overloaded Zambian truck capsized a pontoon, drowning 18 people. Milimo was working on that day, on a different pontoon.

The 2003 disaster precipitated a public outcry in both Zambia and Botswana for a safer, more reliable crossing. In August 2007, concrete discussions between governments were held, and

an agreement to build the Kazungula Bridge was made. Construction began in 2014.

The displaced families were compensated with new land and newly-built houses. But the shiny modern buildings are already showing cracks. "These houses weren't meant to last," Milimo says, standing in the doorway of his mother's home.

While Kazungula boasts the most well-run border post in the region, informal trade by small-time smugglers and merchants remains, evading the polished infrastructure for old informal



Ripple effect: Before the bridge, cross-border travel relied on pontoon ferries that frequently broke down.

routes. Fishermen in worn-out canoes still row toward unseen borders, bypassing customs and tariffs too steep for survival.

In dry seasons, when farming falters, more people turn to cross-border trade to make ends meet. This has only become more important in recent years: it is raining less than it used to, and average temperatures have risen by around 2°C in the region. As a result, 64% of households are food insecure, with 91% reporting serious shortages of staples like maize, and 72% relying on purchased vegetables.

Kazungula is constantly moving. Not with the elegance that characterises the metropolis but with the urgency of survival. In the hum of engines, the

creak of old canoes, the town breathes and sometimes sighs.

Kazungula's role as a gateway is not new. For decades, it processed labourers bound for South African mines, embedding the town in a continent-wide history of migration.

Today, its people still straddle old and new worlds, negotiating identity through movement and memory. The border post is not just a bridge between nations; it is a bridge between eras, between necessity and ambition. ■

'Borderlands' is a series by *The Continent*, reporting from some of Africa's most interesting border crossings. The series is part of the African Union's Move Africa project, supported by GIZ

DATA

The poorer you are, the poorer the service

THE UNITED Nations created Public Service Day (23 June) to “celebrate the value and virtue of public service to the community”. But not all community members will rejoice equally: Some get less than others.

Between end-2021 and mid-2023, Afrobarometer asked citizens in 39 countries who had sought key public services to report on their experiences. Among those who requested police assistance in the year prior to the survey, half (49%) found it “difficult” or “very difficult” to obtain the help they needed.

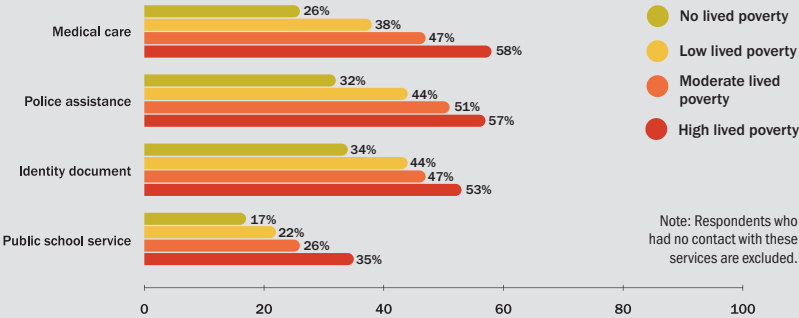
Slightly smaller shares reported difficulty obtaining medical care from

public clinics or hospitals (46%) and official documents from government departments (45%), while a quarter (26%) said getting support from schools proved problematic.

The poor have a tougher time of it. Africa’s least well-off are twice as likely as the well-to-do to face obstacles at state health facilities (58% vs. 26%) and schools (35% vs. 17%). And majorities of the poor report difficulty in receiving IDs (53%) and police assistance (57%), compared to a third of wealthy citizens (34% and 32%, respectively).

Money can’t buy happiness, but it might afford you superior service. ■

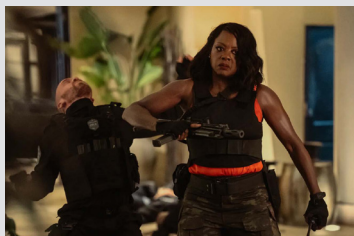
Difficulty obtaining public services | among respondents who sought services | by lived poverty | 39 African countries | 2021/2023





REVIEW

WILFRED OKICHE



Madam President to the rescue

When calamity comes for world leaders, only Viola Davis can save us from terrorists.

AHEAD OF the Group of 20 gathering of world leaders in Johannesburg this November, Hollywood has decided to give us an action-packed “what if” spin on geopolitics.

Set in Cape Town, the Patricia Riggen-directed *G20* is far removed from the realities of the present day.

Somehow, the United States has managed to elect a woman president – a capable war hero, no less. And in this fictional world, the US is still very much

interested in leading the free world.

The formidable Viola Davis leads the cast of this fun – if ridiculous – spin on the boilerplate action films of the 90s. As President Danielle Sutton, she is a world-weary leader and family woman trying to sell her fellow world leaders on her plan to put a dent in world hunger.

Upon arrival in Cape Town she finds herself thrust into a chaotic situation, when a right-wing Australian crypto-terrorist (Anthony Starr) and his soldiers of fortune infiltrate the summit and take the assembled world leaders hostage. His grand idea is to make them record deepfake videos in order to destroy global stock markets.

Thankfully, Madam President has seen action in Iraq and in this wish-fulfilment fantasy, is uniquely positioned to take on her opposition and save the world. The writers make a half-hearted attempt to sell some old-fashioned jingoism, but this immediately feels so disconnected to today’s world, it barely registers.

As in 2022’s historical epic *The Woman King*, Oscar-winner Davis demonstrates her action chops alongside local actors, in this case Noxolo Dlamini (*Silverton Siege*) and Theo Bongani Ndyalwane (*Prey*). *G20* is most effective when it stays on topic, making Davis take down a bunch of baddies.

That’s what the people want to see. The rest is background noise. ■

The Quiz

- 1 Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo is which country's president?
- 2 True or false: He is the only president the country has had.
- 3 Mombasa is Kenya's capital. True or false?
- 4 Which country is runner Caster Semenya from?
- 5 What is Morocco's currency called?
- 6 *Pata Pata* is a song by which artist?
- 7 Naqa, or Naga'a (pictured) is an ancient Kushite city in which present-day country?
- 8 Chipata, Kabwe and Ndola are cities in which country?
- 9 Which city's name is wrongly alleged to be from the phrase "Akasozì k'empala"?
- 10 Which river does the Kazungula Bridge span?



HOW DID I DO?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to **+27 73 805 6068** and we'll send the answers to you!

0-3

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

4-7

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

8-10

"This is much more impressive than my own encounters with ancient Kush, I have to say."

PHOTO: ERIC LAFFORGUE/ART IN ALL OF US/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Big Pic

Feat of clay: Malians join the annual re-plastering of the Great Mosque of Djenné in Djenné, on 12 June. First built in the 13th century, the mosque is the largest earthen monument in the world.

PHOTO: OUSMANE MAKAVELI/AFP



The Continent is a member of the Press Council of South Africa. This means we adhere to its Code of Ethics. It also means that there's an independent body you can reach out to with a complaint about our reporting. That process is on their website — www.presscouncil.org.za.

**all protocol
observed.**

publisher of **The Continent**

The Continent is published by All Protocol Observed, a not-for-profit based in South Africa. Our home is dedicated to creating a space for African journalists to do quality journalism, which we then get to you wherever you are. For suggestions, queries, complaints, or to make a donation, please contact us at read@thecontinent.org