

## Hakaide Hichilema vows to free Zambia from corruption

Written by Administrator  
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Jane Flanagan, Cape Town – 25/08/2021

Zambia's new president was sworn in yesterday following his landslide election victory, in front of a VIP guest list that put Africa's autocrats on notice.

[Hakaide Hichilema](#), 59, took the oath of office in the capital Lusaka before jubilant supporters, heads of state and their political rivals in an acknowledgment of the new president's lengthy stint as a political outsider.

On his sixth bid for the presidency, Hichilema [defeated the incumbent](#) Edgar Lungu, 64, by almost one million votes – despite restrictions on campaigning, a crackdown on his supporters and reported attempts at rigging in favour of Lungu's party.

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As the packed Heroes Stadium clapped and roared approval, Hichilema told the crowd: “Democracy is the way to go — for Zambia, the people of Africa and the world.” He pledged to root out corruption, invest in education and rebuild an economy buckling under a \$12 billion debt mountain.

“No Zambian should go to be hungry,” the leader told his supporters, who call him “HH” or “Bally” — an informal term for father.

The majority for his United Party for National Development marked Zambia’s third transfer of power through the ballot box since the founding president Kenneth Kaunda stood down after reluctantly agreeing to [multi-party elections](#) .

Hichilema has been arrested many times since he switched from a successful business career to politics, but he thanked his predecessor for his service and peaceful surrender of power, against all predictions that Lungu would attempt to cling on.

“I came to witness the total burying of Lungu and corruption,” said Mateyo Simukonda, 36, who had travelled overnight from the country’s mining heartlands to watch the ceremony. “We have now put him [Lungu] to rest and let him rest in peace.”

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Growing repression and economic mismanagement during Lungu's six years in office had prompted fears that Zambia would become a "new Zimbabwe". Debt as a share of GDP rose on his watch from 34 per cent to 110 per cent, diverting budgets from basic services and sending food prices sharply upwards.

Although ruling party efforts to hinder Hichilema's campaign left him "effectively competing with one hand tied behind his back", according to Sishuwa Sishuwa, from the University of Zambia, strategic deals with smaller opposition parties and the huge turnout of 71 per cent delivered a victory that was too big to be stolen.

The opposition victory comes at a time when democracy is generally receding worldwide and African dictators are making the most of pandemic restrictions. It also follows last year's overturning of a stolen election in Malawi, and the trend has unsettled some.

President Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe, whose main rival, Nelson Chamisa, joined him in the Lusaka stadium, has already warned opponents not to harbour similar ambitions. Commenting on a picture of Zimbabwe's opposition leader with the new Zambian president, Mnangagwa's information secretary compared Chamisa to a bridesmaid who never becomes the bride.

President Masisi of Botswana was more gracious and gave a seat on his plane to the ceremony to Dumelang Saleshando, the leader of his opposition.

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