



FROM ZAMBIA TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Russia's ties with Zambia have a history that predates independence. The USSR was the first country to recognise Zambia as an independent state in 1964. Since then, the two nations have cooperated on health, science, and defence.

Zambia was liberated from British colonial rule in 1961 and became independent in 1964. Russia and Zambia immediately established diplomatic relations, which, unlike Western countries, did not hesitate to recognise newly independent states.

Zambia was an important partner of the Soviet Union from 1960–1980. The Soviet Union provided financial resources and academic scholarships to socialist countries and low-income economies in return for their political support on geopolitical issues. While its focus was more on military cooperation than economic aid, some of these academic and cultural connections remain.

When President Kenneth Kaunda came to power, he played an important role in fighting for freedom and regional unity on the continent. He used his relationship with the Soviet Union to support national liberation movements in many Sub-Saharan countries. While Kaunda promoted socialism, he was never very close to Moscow.

Still, Kaunda visited Russia twice, in 1974 and 1987. During the first decade of Kaunda's presidency (1964–1975), we saw the most active economic and industrial cooperation between USSR and Zambia. In 1967, Zambia and USSR signed the Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation, and in December 1971, the two nations agreed on additional trade agreements. As a result of the latter, the USSR was involved in the construction of four diesel power stations in Zambia's North-Western province, and in the late 1970s, the two countries established a direct air route between Lusaka and Moscow. They also signed the Protocol on Recognition of Qualifications and Academic Degrees, which allowed Zambian students to be enrolled in the Russian educational system.

From 1970 to 80s, the Soviet Union provided a significant amount of military aid, aircraft, arms and heavy equipment supplies worth hundreds of millions of dollars and supported the Zambian Defence Force through professional training. Zambia used Soviet loans to buy mostly military equipment and initiate infrastructure projects. Political cooperation between the two countries diminished at the beginning of the 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed, and President Frederick Chiluba was elected president of Zambia. President Chiluba ended Zambian humanism and opened the country to a free-market economy and privatisation. The new government was, however, still indebted to Russia, where under President Edgar Lungu, the Patriotic Front signed a memorandum of cooperation in 2016 with the governing United Russia party to enhance political corporation between Zambia and Russia.

Russia deploys a narrative about the Soviet Union's important role in the anti-colonial movement and its close connections with African states. As a strategic partner, Russia has opened new chapters and started building better relations with African nations and made its move by writing off several African countries' debts accumulated from the Soviet era. After the Soviet collapse, Russia first attempted to collect its debts. Indeed, these Soviet-leaning debts to African countries were unable to pay back debts to Russia and accumulated to an amount of \$20 billion.

As Russia continue to facilitate energetic ties with African nations, President Vladimir Putin on Monday, 20th March 2023, said Moscow has written off the debts of African states worth more than \$20 billion while speaking at an international parliamentary conference that brought together 40 African nations in Moscow.

The international parliamentary conference 'Russia-Africa in a Multipolar World' was aimed at strengthening ties between Russia and African nations and promoting cooperation in various sectors, including trade, energy, healthcare, and education. At the conference, Putin expressed Russia's commitment to work together with Africa "to strengthen fair and equal interstate relations and improve mechanisms of mutually beneficial economic cooperation. Besides bolstering

direct trade between Russia and the African continent, Putin also spoke about his envisioned global financial system that is not dominated by the U.S. dollar.

President Putin said the trade turnover between Russia and African countries is growing every year, reaching almost \$18 billion in 2022. He further said: "Additional opportunities are opened up by the process of establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which began in 2021 and will become a continental market with a total GDP of more than \$3 trillion. He continued to say, "Russia is in favour of establishing ties with AfCFTA both through the Eurasian Economic Union and on a bilateral level, adding that Africa will become one of the leaders of the multipolar world."

Putin reiterated his country's commitment to meeting its obligations on supplies of food products, fertilisers, fuel, and other critical products to African countries. Putin said Russia is playing a vital role in ensuring food and energy security in the continent. He also expressed his country's readiness to supply fertilisers to African nations for free but added that obstacles are being thrown in their way by the West because many Russian resources are frozen in European countries, including fertilisers, to countries in need for free, with first batches already delivered.

Russia plays an important role in the international fertiliser market due to its abundant natural resources (potash, phosphate, and nitrogen) and strong fertiliser production capacity (modern production facilities and operational efficiency). In addition to Russia's strong position in the global fertiliser market, they have actively promoted fertilisers and agricultural products to Africa, Asia, and Latin America markets. The country has established close partnerships with several African countries, offering them favourable financing terms and other incentives to import Russian fertilisers and other products.

As the partnership between Russia and African countries continues to gain momentum and reach new levels, this geopolitical change presents an opportunity to boost economic cooperation for mutually beneficial socio-economic growth. In this context, Zambia has become significant to global priorities and a potential African ally for Western powers in global geopolitics, and to Russia and China, not just as a major debtor, but as an ongoing economic partner and valuable source of natural resources.

Balancing these interests requires the promotion of fair systems, supported by economic institutions that allow a transparent and efficient market to function, while interventions must ensure benefits increase for Zambia and its people. Realising this will require significant improvements in dialogue, diplomacy and the implementation of a strong strategic socioeconomic and environmental development plan.

Since coming into power, President Hichilema and his administration have demonstrated assertive and positive neutrality in international relations and economic diplomacy. Still, the government would also benefit from better promotion and acknowledgement of the importance of non-Western partners that would help depolarise Zambia's international relations with Russia and China while also addressing domestic allegations of neo-colonialism from Western nations. Because Russia, Africa, Asia, and Latin America make up the majority of the world against the neo-colonial ideology, as they uphold moral norms, social principles, and traditions of their people, and oppose neo-colonial ideology imposed on them from outside.

While attracting investment is crucial for the legitimacy of the Hichilema government, domestic political and economic pressure is increasing as electoral promises of job opportunities and improved living standards have become harder to deliver against the backdrop of rising food and fuel prices caused by factors way beyond Zambia's control.

President Hichilema's government delivering on this promise, including building the continuous momentum in anti-corruption that will contribute to greater trust between elected governments and Zambia's civil services will likewise require international support that contributes to poor governance coming from international actors undermining the fight against corruption and democracy in Zambia.

Good governance and combating corruption will ensure Zambian citizens have an equitable and sustainable stake in the nation's strategic industries, and Zambian citizens will require transparent communication and consultation to guarantee ordinary Zambian citizens have a sense of ownership of the country's future and understand the benefits resulting from the Zambian government and its foreign relations.

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