



## Chess Grandmaster Honored by President of Zambia

*UT Dallas Graduate Student is Sub-Saharan Africa's Highest-Ranked Player*

Nov. 11, 2009

A UT Dallas chess team grandmaster has been formally recognized by the president of Zambia, his home country.

Amon Simutowe, an international political economy graduate student, was honored by President Rupiah Banda with the President's Medal of Meritorious Achievement.

"This honor is generally given to people who are older. The average age of recipients is usually above 40, so it was a great surprise for the president to honor me much earlier," said Simutowe. "It's great to have attention from my home country, especially when you are just doing something you enjoy."

Simutowe is the only grandmaster (GM) from Sub-Saharan Africa and is Africa's only black GM. He is only the third black GM in the world.

The GM title is awarded to outstanding chess players by Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE), the world chess federation. Grandmaster is the highest title a chess player can attain. It is awarded to players whose FIDE ratings exceed 2500. Once achieved, the distinction is held for life.

Simutowe was honored during the Zambian Independence Day investiture ceremony on Oct. 24, but he was unable to return home in time to attend the ceremony and receive the award in person.

"I was told about the award three days before the ceremony, which did not leave me enough time to get back home. It was unfortunate that I was unable to attend; however, I will certainly try to pay a courtesy call the next time I am home," said Simutowe.

Simutowe began playing chess at age 10 and at age 13 won the under-21 Zambia national championship. In 1996, he again won the national championship and the junior national championship.

"We don't have a large chess culture in Africa, so I was never formally trained. My brother, an amateur-level chess player, taught me; and after he left the country to study in England, he sent me a British chess magazine that became my main source of chess knowledge. Managing to become a grandmaster is notable progress," said Simutowe.

He earned two international master norms when he won the African Junior Chess Championship in 1998 and retained the title the following year after winning all the games. He later competed and finished second at the World Junior Championship.

The international master (IM) title is a lifetime title awarded by FIDE also, and it is the level before GM. Usually, three favorable results, or norms, in international tournaments involving other IMs and GMs are required before FIDE will award a player the title, which is usually given to players whose rating is between 2400 and 2500.

Simutowe is from the Zambian capital of [Lusaka](#). He came to UT Dallas in 2003 to study economics and graduated in 2006. He is currently an international political economy graduate student in the [School of Economic, Political & Policy Sciences](#).



"It's great to have attention from my home country, especially when you are just doing something you enjoy," said Amon Simutowe of the UT Dallas chess team.

**Media Contacts:** Teala Miller, UT Dallas Office of Media Relations, (972)

883-2155, [newscenter@utdallas.edu](mailto:newscenter@utdallas.edu)  
or Karah Hosek, UT Dallas, 972-883-4329, [karah.hosek@utdallas.edu](mailto:karah.hosek@utdallas.edu)

800 West Campbell Road (972) 883-2111  
Richardson, TX, 75080