

Gov't asked to depoliticise MBC

By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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The Public Affairs Committee (PAC), a predominantly faith-based organisation which is reportedly very influential in Malawi, has called on authorities in government to depoliticise state owned broadcaster, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC).

PAC which has issued a communiqué following a two-day long conference held in Blantyre over the weekend observed that Malawi is in dire need of a clear media strategy.

"We need a strategy that will ensure that the national vision is shared with the rest of the country," reads the communiqué, signed by the conference chairman, Bishop Montfort Sitima of The Catholic Church.

A need to depoliticized the MBC

The communiqué says within this strategy there is also need to depoliticized MBC which has become a political diary for president Joyce Banda, her cabinet ministers and her ruling People's Party officials.

Experts says since MBC gets budgetary allocation from government annually; with such assistance, and while still reporting and getting policy direction from the minister of Information and Civic Education, the media institution cannot be spared from becoming a 'noticeboard' of government and the ruling party.

"The country should also come up with a media development fund under an act of parliament to contribute to the financial sustainability," says Bishop Sitima in the communiqué.

PAC observed during the conference that Malawi's state institutions including MBC seem to have been captured by the Executive Arm of Government and as a result they have lost autonomy and impartiality in the discharge of their duties.

"We are calling upon the government to respect the autonomy of the state institutions in the principle of the doctrine of the separation of powers," says PAC in its recommendations.

"Time to Restore Democratic and Economic Governance"

PAC's conference, which it calls 'a two-day All-Inclusive Stakeholders Conference', was held under the theme "Time to Restore Democratic and Economic Governance".

Delegates to the conference included the media fraternity, political parties, the academia, representatives of the Malawi Defense Force and Malawi Police Service, the legal fraternity, Malawi Congress of Trade Union, representatives of civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations, faith leaders, the private sector, and observers from various sectors including key donor organizations.

The delegates said they want information minister, Moses Kunkuyu, to live by his pledges when he was appointed minister in May this year.

A lack of professionalism

He told local media that many viewers stopped watching and listening to MBC due to lack of professionalism as it was turned into a propaganda tool for the former ruling Democratic Progressive Party.

"Many Malawians stopped watching MBC TV long time ago, let alone listening to the radio hence MBC should improve its programming and editorial content," Kunkuyu was quoted as saying.

The minister is still of the view that MBC can solve challenges due to inadequate funding and lack of resources by ensuring that the government adding its assistance through the budgetary allocation.

"MBC has other mechanisms of generating funds like adverts which has however failed to gain ground due to lack of professionalism," he said.

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