



SPEECH DELIVERED BY

COMMISSIONER, Reverend Clifford Baloyi

DURING THE OPENING OF

ELECTIONS REPORTING TRAINING FOR MEDIA

PRACTITIONERS

17ND OCTOBER, 2018

Public Affairs Section, US Embassy
Lilongwe

- The US Ambassador, Ms Virginia Palmer
- MISA Malawi chairperson, Mrs Teresa Ndanga
- Our lead facilitator from Voice of America, Prof J. Mower
- MEC management and staff
- Distinguished Participants
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I should start by saying that am delighted to be here and offer a few remarks before the start of this workshop. This is one of the initiatives the Commission has undertaken with support from Development Partners as part of capacity building for the media ahead of the Tripartite Elections in 2019.

The media are a crucial partner in elections and as Malawi Electoral Commission, we are eager to see to it that our partners are performing their roles in a professional and excellent manner and that any competency gaps should be addressed. That is why we have lined up a number of training workshops aiming at equipping our stakeholders with knowledge and skills.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the training starting today is very important and for the three days that you will be here, it will be demanded of you to pay maximum attention.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to talk about the responsibility of the media in ensuring that we have credible elections. Because the media reach out to a wider audience within a short time, you have

a critical role of bringing electoral information to the public. You need to do this in a manner that does not disadvantage or project any contestant. Otherwise, if the media do not offer a level playing field for all contestants, this approach can easily undermine all the efforts by the Malawi Electoral Commission and all stakeholders to have free, fair and credible elections next year. This would be a disservice to the nation.

I should commend the media in Malawi because it has helped in mobilizing the public to participate in electoral processes. Unlike in other countries where the media has rendered a disservice and dissuaded people from participating in electoral activities, in Malawi the media has helped to build a well informed electorate that is motivated and interested to participate in elections.

As we are in elections period, may I also appeal to you to exercise reason and rationale in your reporting. Elections are an emotive exercise because of what is at stake. No one goes into an election expecting to lose although the fact still stands out that there will always be only one winner. You should be cautious that the material you broadcast or publish does not perpetrate hostility, violence, aggression, hatred, tribalism, unrest, conflict or anything that falls in this class. Examples abound world over where media, without exercising caution in their reportage have fueled electoral disputes resulting in civil unrests and loss of life. The Rwandan genocide always stands out as a classical example. We would not want such

scenarios for Malawi and that is why we are conducting trainings like this one so that will empower you report objectively about elections.

I should also urge you to be cautious on reporting opinion polls. We usually have pollsters surfacing during elections some of whom their credentials are very questionable and always come up with questionable poll statistics. We would urge you to question such characters before publishing their results. Some of the opinions that are published, have potential impact of discouraging the electorate from participating in electoral activities and perpetuating voter apathy. Always ask the pollsters to disclose how they carried out their opinion poll, their sample size, who commissioned the opinion poll and when it was done. Few critical questions can unearth information that can help you establish whether an opinion poll was bogus or genuine.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I will not resume my seat without talking about the new media. Facebook, twitter, blogs and other platforms that have become effective and cost-effective tools for communication. With the convergence of the media, we have already seen newspapers and radio stations setting up Facebook pages. This just shows the influence that the social media platforms are gaining. I have also noted that some journalists have their own Facebook pages and blogs where they post their material to share with the public. I should urge you to apply your journalistic ethics and standards when using social media.

The media code of conduct is not suspended just because the material is being distributed through new media. Those with interactive platforms where readers can post comments ought to exercise care and responsibility that the comments being posted are palatable and that they could run in their papers or radio. If newspapers edit letters to the editor why should they not exercise the same with comments from readers for their online publications? Without curtailing freedom of expression, the media have a responsibility to ensure that there is sanity in the comments and feedback from readers that appears on the online publications.

At this juncture, allow me to thank the US Embassy for jointly supporting this workshop with MEC. The US Embassy has provided the venue, refreshments and lunch and above all they have brought in an international expert from the Voice of America to be the lead facilitator for this training. The Commission is grateful for this gesture. Allow me to thank MISA Malawi for jointly working with our secretariat in arranging for this training.

It is now my honor and privilege to declare this workshop opened. I wish you fruitful time and stay at this place.

Thank you very much

May God bless you all

May God Bless Our Nation