



**SPEECH DELIVERED BY
MEC CHAIRPERSON, JUSTICE DR CHIFUNDO KACHALE**

**DURING THE OPENING OF
THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MEDIA AND ELECTIONS**

6TH OCTOBER, 2020

LILONGWE

- My fellow Commissioners
- MEC Chief Elections Officer, Mr. Sam Alfandika and all staff from MEC
- The Chairperson of MISA Malawi, Mrs Tereza Ndanga and all media managers present here
- The Chairperson of Media Council of Malawi, Mr. Wisdom Chimgwede
- The Executive Director of Centre for Multiparty Democracy (CMD), Mr. Kizito Tenthani
- The Director of Broadcasting at MACRA, Mr. Fegus Lipenga
- Managers from various media houses present here
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very delighted to be here and offer a few remarks before the start of this national conference on media and elections today. This is a landmark event as far as engagement of MEC and the media is concerned especially after holding the Fresh Presidential Election on 23rd June, 2020 and also the Tripartite Elections in 2019.

The Commission has invited all media managers and relevant stakeholders so that together we may reflect and

review how the media performed during the past two national elections. The Commission has deliberately targeted media managers because in our understanding you are the gatekeepers. As gatekeepers, you are very critical in deciding and controlling what gets published and not. In other words, you determine the editorial policy of your institution and how its implemented. Apart from that role, you will recall that in preparation for the elections, the media managers gathered here in Lilongwe in 2018 to review and adopt the Media Code of Conduct on Reporting Elections and came here again in 2019 to develop and adopt the Implementation Toolkit for the Media Code of Conduct.

The two documents have been very critical in guiding how the media reports on elections. Besides the two, there is the Communications Act, Broadcasting Licenses and other instruments that also have a bearing on how the media environment is regulated during elections

Ladies and gentlemen, 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 within the law. The Commission is eager to see to it that any competency or knowledge gap should be addressed so that technical incapacitation should not hinder delivery. That is why, whenever resources are available, we endeavor to engage the media more especially on capacity building.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is right and proper that I should also commend and appreciate the important role that the media played during the past two elections. The media helped educate the public and mobilized them to take active role in elections. Because of the wider reach of the media, the Commission could also get its messages across with relative ease without having to meet each and every voter physically as we had to deliver the event in the context of a public health COVID pandemic.

There are examples which I am sure you are familiar with from other regions where the media's role has been dysfunctional and has derailed electoral process thereby stifling the democratic space. Fortunately for us, this has not been the case and we should not take it for granted, but we should applaud everybody involved from the media

profession for ensure that the democratic space is guaranteed for all players.

Whilst we cherish your positive contribution to the growth of democracy in the country, we should continue to be on the lookout for any traits that might attempt to swerve the media from its right course and degenerate into playing a role that has been seen in other jurisdictions where the media has been perverted to actually perpetrate discord. We must strengthen the safeguards and one way of doing that is by ensuring that the media are always reminded of their roles during critical times especially elections. As media managers, you need to continue to remain vigilant and ensure that your work is not being manipulated to promote and help to achieve the ambitions of the selfish few who may have access and control over media institutions. You need to always be thinking of a greater good to the society and be sensitive to the conflict triggers that may arise in the course of your reporting.

At this juncture, on behalf of the Elector Commission, I should express our gratitude to our Development Partners, namely the UNDP, EU, DFID UK, Irish Aid and USAID for

supporting this external review process through the UNDP managed basket fund. Without your support we could not have managed to hold this meeting today.

But we would also like to express our gratitude to the various institutions that are represented in this house, you could have chosen to ignore our invitation to this meeting but your presence makes this a very useful engagement and for that, we are very grateful. It is our hope as the Commission that we will continue to collaborate with the media to ensure that our work together helps to build an informed electorate beyond even just the elections as an event.

We are all very much aware about voter apathy and challenges in voter turnout in our elections and we cannot hope to overcome that challenge without some concerted efforts to mobilize our citizenry and to help them appreciate the democratic and civic responsibility they have to participate actively in elections.

With these few remarks, it is my singular honour to declare the conference opened, I would like to thank you all for your kind attention,

May God bless you all,

May God bless Malawi

Thank you so much.