



PUBLIC STATEMENT

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CONCLUSION OF THE ANNUAL MEDIA AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION CONFERENCE 2024 (AMATIC24)

The Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) and the Media Council of Malawi (MCM) are pleased to announce the successful conclusion of the inaugural **Annual Media and Access to Information Conference of 2024 (AMATIC24)**, held from September 26th to 27th, 2024 at the Bingu International Convention Centre (BICC).

This landmark event brought together over 150 delegates including media practitioners, civil society representatives, policymakers, and development partners from across the country to discuss critical issues surrounding media freedom and the right to access information.

1. Conference Theme

This year's conference was held under the theme **“Promoting Free Flow of Information Towards the 2025 General Elections.”** This theme underscores the importance of ensuring that all citizens have access to reliable and accurate information as we approach this critical electoral period.

2. Objectives of the Conference

- i. Provide a platform for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among media stakeholders, electoral stakeholders, civil society organizations, policymakers, and citizens on the critical role of media freedom and access to information in promoting transparent, fair, and credible electoral processes.
- ii. Discuss challenges, opportunities, and best practices in leveraging media platforms, information resources, and communication tools to enhance public knowledge, citizen participation, and electoral transparency.
- iii. Advocate for inclusive media coverage, balanced representation, and diverse voices in election reporting, highlighting marginalized perspectives, minority issues, and civic education efforts to promote a more inclusive, participatory, and representative electoral discourse.
- iv. Commemorate the International Day for Universal Access to Information by emphasizing the critical link between open, transparent governance, active citizen engagement, and the right to access information as fundamental pillars of democracy and human rights protection.
- v. Recognize and present awards to better-performing institutions in implementing the Access to Information Law in Malawi.

3. Conference Activities

The conference started with a solidarity march followed by viewing the pavilions by Guest of Honour, Justice Anabel Mtalimanja – MEC Chairperson, and other dignitaries.

Participants were engaged in dynamic discussions and presentations, focusing on key topics such as:

- 1) The Principles and Values of Electoral Integrity
- 2) Safeguarding the Civic Space and Media Freedoms
- 3) Addressing Challenges and Opportunities in Civic Education During Elections
- 4) Combating election-related disinformation, misinformation and advancing fact-checking
- 5) Supporting Independent Election Monitoring, and Data-Driven Reporting
- 6) Access to Information visa- viz Elections and Media Pluralism
- 7) Rethinking the Critical Link Between Transparent Governance, Active Citizen Engagement, and The Right to Access to Information as Fundamental Pillars of Democracy and Human Rights
- 8) Strides in the ATIA implementation in Malawi: successes, challenges and opportunities
- 9) The challenges facing journalists, especially women and marginalized voices, in their pursuit of truth and justice.

4. Key Takeaways

4.1. Key Takeaways for the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC)

Enhancing Transparency

- MEC is committed to ensuring transparency in the electoral process by providing accurate and timely information to voters and electoral stakeholders through media various platforms.

Collaboration with Media

- MEC is committed to strengthening partnerships with media organizations for capacity building of media practitioners, media monitoring, and widespread dissemination of electoral information and updates, thereby increasing public engagement.

More stakeholder engagement

- MEC was asked to support engagement of MHRC and media organizations (MCM and MISA) with political party representatives, and Registrar of Political Parties on protection of the civic space, issues of safety of media practitioners, access to information from political parties, media independence, and information pollution (disinformation, misinformation, hate-speech and mal-information).

- Stakeholders asked MEC to facilitate a transparent engagement with stakeholders (Government - NRB, political parties) on voter registration, specifically on the use of National IDs.

4.2. Key Takeaways for Media Organizations

- **Responsible Journalism:** Media outlets were urged to uphold ethical standards in their reporting, particularly in combating misinformation and disinformation.
- **Diverse Coverage:** Journalists were encouraged to offer more diverse election coverage, ensuring representation of marginalized groups such as women, youth, and minorities.
- **Use of Technology:** The media was urged to use digital platforms responsibly to ensure that election information reaches the widest audience while minimizing information pollution.

4.3. Key Takeaways for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- **Grassroots Engagement:** CSOs were encouraged to enhance their engagement with communities to educate them on electoral rights and encourage voter participation, thereby reducing voter apathy.
- **Monitoring and Advocacy:** CSOs were asked to support media monitoring efforts and advocate for necessary reforms to safeguard electoral integrity.

4.4. Key Takeaways for Government and Development Partners:

- **Capacity Building Investments:** Development partners were urged to invest in capacity-building for media and civil society organizations to enhance their role in the electoral process.
- **Government Commitment:** The government was asked to provide adequate support towards ATIA implementation and other transparency-related initiatives.

5. Recognition of better-performing institutions in implementing the Access to Information Law in Malawi.

Awards were given to better-performing institutions in their compliance with Access to Information Act requirements.

- 5.1. Trophies were given to Blantyre Water Board (BWB), Central Medical Stores Trust (CMST), and Pharmacy Medicines Regulatory Authority (PMRA).
- 5.2. Certificates were given to the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), Greenbelt Authority (GBA), Public Procurement and Disposal of Assets Authority (PPDA), Roads Fund Administration (RFA), Reserve Bank of Malawi (RBM), Electricity Generation Company Malawi Limited (EGENCO), Lilongwe Water Board (LWB).

6. Conclusion

MHRC and MCM would like to recognize the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) for joining this collaboration to host the inaugural conference.

Together, we express our gratitude to all participants, sponsors, and partners who contributed to the success of this inaugural event.

We thank the Central Medical Stores Trust (CMST), Chandler Foundation, Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi LTD (ESCOM), Green Belt Authority (GBA), Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA), Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA), Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS), National Economic Empowerment Fund Limited (NEEF), National Oil Company of Malawi Limited (NOCMA), Reserve Bank of Malawi (RBM), Tilitonse Foundation, and the United States Embassy – Malawi for their financial contributions.

We call upon Government institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, and the general public to join us in advocating for the protection and promotion of media freedom and access to information as fundamental human rights essential for the democratic development of our nation.

Signed:



Habiba Osman

Executive Secretary

Malawi Human Rights Commission



Moses Kaufa

Executive Director, Media Council of Malawi

Dated this 12th October 2024

