

# MALAWI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



## Press Release

### **JOURNALISM UNDER DIGITAL SIEGE: PROTECTING JOURNALISM AND FREE SPEECH IN A DIGITAL AGE**

The Malawi Human Rights Commission (the Commission) joins the world in commemorating the World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD) which is celebrated every year on 3 May. This day serves as a reminder to governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom and also provides a time of reflection among media practitioners about issues of press freedom and professional ethics.

The Press have an important role in the promotion and protection of human rights, especially the right of access to information enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi. “*The press shall have the right to report and publish freely, within Malawi and abroad and to be accorded the fullest possible facilities for access to public information*” (Section 36).

Press freedom faces new challenges in the digital age. Surveillance and hacking put journalists, their work and sources at risk, violating the fundamental principles of whistleblower and source protection. Recently the country was shocked by the arrest of Gregory Gondwe whose gadgets were confiscated in an effort to force him to release his sources contrary to Access to Information Act (ATIA) Section 4(e) which provides for protection of persons who release information of public interest in good faith.

There have also been several examples of journalists who have been threatened, harassed, physically assaulted and even arrested for exercising their right. Additionally, there are also increasing cases of people being arrested for merely exercising their right to freedom of speech and expression. Social media surveillance is becoming the norm.

The Commission would like to remind government of its commitment to uphold the rule of law and protect the rights of its citizens enshrined in the Constitution of the country. Government should work together with journalists to discuss emerging challenges and identifying workable solutions. Policy makers, telecommunication companies, regulatory authorities, Information Technology experts, Cybersecurity experts and legal experts should join the conversation to protect press freedom, freedom of expression and safety of journalists particularly now in the digital era which has exponentially expanded media platforms for journalists and the public.

Journalists should maintain media ethics to protect media viability and public trust. In exercising their right, they must remember their duty to their profession but also to the country as critical agents in promoting access to information and human rights education in the country. Citizens should also use social media responsibly and objectively.

World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993, following the recommendation of UNESCO'S General Conference in 1991 (UNESCO 26 C/Resoltion.4.3).



Scader Louis  
**CHAIRPERSON**  
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