

Malawi: ABJ cautions media practitioners

 By [Gregory Gondwe](#)

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The Association of Business Journalists (ABJ) has become the only journalist grouping that has cautioned media practitioners to verify materials they get before publishing stories in the face of accusations by President Bingu wa Mutharika that some media outlets are publishing lies to discredit his government.

Some quarters of the practitioners have however taken the caution with a pinch of salt considering that ABJ national co-ordinator Thomas Chafunya, who made the cautions, works for the state-controlled Malawi Broadcasting Corporation.

Take business, economics seriously - Chafunya

At the workshop for business journalists in Lilongwe on 4 September 2010, Chafunya urged media practitioners to take business and economic news very serious.

"Let us move away from the rhetoric of copy and paste reports from organisations and institutions. Let us engage the community out there in bringing substance into our reports and articles," he said.

He cited an example on the issue where one of Malawi's weeklies *The Malawi News* quoted a SADC report which suggests that over one million people in Malawi face hunger this year.

He said since this was a business story and knowing that Malawi is an agro-based economy as practitioners, journalists should not have forgotten that maize determines and gauges the economy.

"Speculation without founded basis can be catastrophic, it presses panic buttons on producers to hoard the product and drive up prices," he said.

MISA-Malawi statement

This was however coming just three days after the Media Institute of Southern Africa MISA-Malawi Chapter had issued a statement which noted its disappointment over the lack of respect for media freedom and freedom of expression in the country.

"The media in Malawi continue to be threatened by government authorities and other sectors of society, including some members of the public," lamented the statement issued by Aubrey Chikungwa, MISA Malawi national director and Brian Ligomeka, MISA Malawi chairperson.

The statement said President Bingu wa Mutharika's warning that he will close down media houses and arrest journalists who continue to report negatively about his administration is the latest threat of a number of threats the media in Malawi continues to receive.

"MISA Malawi is also aware of threats on individual journalists as well as media houses, from people who claim to have been defamed in stories written by the concerned reporters or published by a particular media house," said the statement.

Crackdown on media

Chikungwa and Ligomeka said that such actions can easily be construed as a deliberate and strategic crackdown by those in authority on media houses deemed to be critical of the government.

"We also feel that such actions instil fear in journalists and other media workers and the overall assumption would be that government is slowly but earnestly taking strategic steps at silencing the media," they said.

"In our view, the media in the country is fulfilling its rightful role as watchdog of society and taking a proactive role in alerting responsible authorities to put in place necessary measures to curb any impending crisis," Chikungwa and Ligomeka further said.

Several local and international media have condemned the Malawi government for threatening the media.

ABOUT GREGORY GONDWE

Gregory Gondwe is a Malawian journalist who started writing in 1993. He is also a media consultant assisting several international journalists pursuing assignments in Malawi. He holds a Diploma and an Intermediate Certificate in Journalism among other media-related certificates. He can be contacted on gregorygondwe@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter at @Kalipochi.

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