

Malawi: MACRA stops radio coverage of demonstrations

Malawi, on 20 July 2011, turned on its head as demonstrations against bad governance turned violent, prompting Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority (MACRA) to stop all privately-owned radio stations, which had been covering the proceedings live, from doing so. Zodiak Broadcasting Station (ZBS), Capital Radio and Joy Radio all confirmed receiving communication from MACRA to stop covering the demonstrations.

 By Gregory Gondwe 21 Jul 2011



Capital Radio director general Al Osman said they have been professionally carrying out live interviews with pro-democracy demonstrators with sensitivity and it was frustrating to be stopped by MACRA.

"MACRA stopped us by saying they have been told by the highest authority that we stop doing so because security officers had told them that it was inflaming the situation," he said.

Protestors flood the streets

Thousands of protestors flooded the streets of the cities Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Zomba and Blantyre to demonstrate against a number of things that are said to be going the wrong way including a newly amended media law, endorsed by President Bingu wa Mutharika that allows the information minister to ban public information deemed contrary to public interest.

The Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC), NGOs, opposition political parties and other civil society organisations organised nationwide demonstrations, which were delayed after an unknown individual took an injunction against the demonstrations. Things turned ugly when impatient people wanted to start marching while police were restraining them forcing the disagreement to spill into violent protests where fear of people are feared dead in the northern city of Mzuzu.

Vehicles and offices belonging to the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) have been burnt, while shops and other shopping malls were broken into and looted.

On the reportage and coverage that the Malawi media accorded the demonstrations, MISA Malawi has issued a statement commending the media fraternity in the country for the wonderful and courageous coverage of the events of Wednesday, 20 July.

"Specifically, the coverage of the nationwide mass demonstrations has been super and excellent in both the electronic and print media," said MISA Malawi acting chairperson Anthony Kasunda.

MISA Malawi commends media coverage

He said MISA Malawi is thrilled with private radio stations live coverage which gave the public almost minute-to-minute account of the events on the streets of the country.

"This information was vital as it kept the public abreast of what was going on and helped them make informed decisions and security precautions," he said.

But the media body decried the act by MACRA which it says curtailed live coverage of the demonstrations

"This was very unfortunate; MISA Malawi will be taking up the issue with MACRA management," he said.

MISA Malawi also expressed its pleasure with the coverage of the demonstrations in print media despite some journalists working under threats from the police who beat them as well as civil society leaders.

"We would like to commend every journalist for the brevity shown in discharging our duty professionally. As promised yesterday, we are also taking up the issue of beating journalists with the inspector general of police," Kasunda said.

The media body, nonetheless appealed to the media fraternity to continue working as a team, insisting that any journalist has information of either more harm to media practitioners or impending arrests, they need to share it across to alert the other.

"Rumours of arrests are making rounds and let us be on the guard but do not feel intimidated. We have a duty to the public," said Kasunda.

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 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](https://twitter.com/Kalipochi). [View my profile and articles...](#)

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