

President Banda talks on arrested journo

 By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

4 Jun 2012

President Joyce Banda has perhaps become the first Malawi head of state to directly comment on the [arrest of a media practitioner](#) and express regret over it. Clement Chinoko, a journalist working for Blantyre Newspaper Limited (BNL), was arrested on 26 May 2012 for a story that appeared in 20 May edition of *The Sunday Times* stating that two women from City of Blantyre allegedly got engaged.

Police spokesperson for the Southern Region, Nicholas Gondwa said they arrested Chinoko and charged with 'conduct likely to cause breach of peace'.

In a press statement issued on 31 May 2012, president Banda, while not commenting on the reasons of the arrest, said she regretted that Chinoko was not charged and brought before court after his arrest, within the 48-hour period as prescribed by the law.

Chinoko was only released on bail on 29 May, having spent over 48 hours in the cooler.

Speaking through her [newly appointed press secretary](#), Steve Nhlane, Banda said she hoped that in future, prosecuting officers and legal counsels for suspects would ensure that people's rights are not violated.

The statement also said the process to charge Chinoko took long because his lawyer demanded that he be transferred from Chileka Police Station where he was being kept to Blantyre Police Station.

Fact of fiction?

The story that got Chinoko arrested, states two female lovers, Redgner Mmangausi and Ruth Banda from Blantyre, held a private engagement ceremony on 19 May in Chigumula Township and it went further to claim that *The Sunday Times* has since sourced pictures depicting the pair sharing romantic moments.

The story quoted sources close to the two, apparently confiding in the paper, that the lovers were joined by friends during the ceremony which was held at their house before explaining what lesbianism is.

Lawyers for the pair sued the journalist and the newspaper for damages in the range of K50m, claiming that the images were captured while acting in a movie they were hired to star in.

MISA-Malawi condemns arrest

Malawi Chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-Malawi) condemned the arrest of Chinoko.

MISA-Malawi chairperson Anthony Kasunda indicated that the matter needs to be investigated thoroughly before subjecting Chinoko to unnecessary physical and mental torture.

"We are mindful of the fact that the police are doing their job and that journalists can also commit crimes. But that said, Chinoko has been in custody for more than 48 hours without trial. This is uncalled for and unconstitutional. The police ought to have concluded their investigations before arresting the reporter," said Kasunda before Chinoko was released.

He argued further that the Malawi media has well set structures to deal with professional misconduct.

"If Chinoko had anything to do with the alleged engagement and misinformation as suggested by the police then the Media Council of Malawi and other relevant bodies like MISA are well-placed and mandated to handle the matter. Journalists should not be arrested for merely doing their job. The police should investigate this matter thoroughly," he said.

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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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