

Malawi commits to advancing media freedom

The government of Malawi has pledged to further support media freedoms after meeting with an international delegation of press freedom organisations, which is campaigning for the repeal of criminal defamation and insult laws across the African continent.

"This government has resolved to be a government of openness, to support freedom of expression and to support the work of the media to have increased access to information in all its forms," said Anthony Livuza, principle secretary to the Ministry of Information of Malawi, after a meeting on Thursday, 7 February 2013.

The delegation, which included the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), Pansy Tlakula, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the Media Institute of Southern African (MISA), and the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria. Over 40 media professionals, members of parliament, constitutional lawyers and press freedom advocates attended a follow-up stakeholders meeting in Lilongwe.

The Malawian constitution provides for the right to free expression and guarantees the press the right to report and publish freely. However, restrictions remain in the Criminal Code, despite positive recent steps by president Joyce Banda to remove offending articles.

"We are encouraged by president Banda's actions, however we are hopeful her government will do more," said WAN-IFRA press freedom director, Alison Meston. "Removing defamation and insult laws from the criminal codes would bring media freedoms in-line with Malawi's constitution."

The government's commitment comes on the back of a recent unanimous resolution, entitled 'Press Freedom for Development and Governance: Need for Reform,' passed by the Pan African Parliament in November 2012.

The resolution specifically calls for the amendment of laws that restrict media freedom and encourages AU Member States to sign the [Declaration of Table Mountain](#), WAN-IFRA's campaign calling for the repeal of criminal defamation and 'insult' laws across the African continent.

Presenting the resolution, Gitobu Imanyara, WAN-IFRA senior ambassador and Kenyan member of the Pan African Parliament, said: "We are encouraging president Banda to join president Sirleaf of Liberia and president Issoufou of Niger in signing the Declaration of Table Mountain and in so doing, ensure that the media can fulfil its role as watchdog over public institutions and be a partner in the fight against corruption."

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