



Press release:

Government has betrayed Malawians on electoral reforms and political financing bills: CHRR and CEDEP call upon MPs to boycott Parliament until the bills are included on the Parliamentary agenda list

6th November 2017

The Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) and the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) are deeply shocked and disappointed over government's failure to table the Electoral Reforms and Political Financing Bills in the next sitting of Parliament.

The absence of the bills on the initial list of bills to be tabled in Parliament is simply a clear sign that the reforms are not a priority to the government. We are not at all satisfied with the explanation given by Leader of the House, Kondwani Nankhumwa, that government has not presented the Electoral Reforms Bills to Parliament because Cabinet is still "scrutinizing" the bills. This explanation is simply an excuse by the government to further delay the electoral reforms that Malawians badly need. Malawians are keen to see the passing of 50+1 electoral system so that national leaders should be elected by the majority.

We at CHRR and CEDEP, and indeed most Malawians, expected the next sitting of Parliament to table this crucial bill so that we can use the law once passed in the 2019 elections. But with less than two years to go before the polls, that prospect is highly unlikely. Obviously, there will not be enough time to put in place the necessary mechanisms to ensure that we use the law in 2019. This is betrayal of the highest order.

Looking at how the current government has behaved in the past over laws that seem to threaten their existence, we suspect that this is yet another calculated move by those in power to delay the electoral reform process. We have every reason to be suspicious because it is clear that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has not been in favour of this bill right from the start and is clearly seeking ways to further delay it.

Government clearly knows that with this delay there will not be enough time to allow for implementation of the laws in 2019. This is very unfortunate. This bill is not about

partisan politics but it is in the interest of the entire nation as it is common knowledge that the electoral landscape has over the years not been level.

A call for MPs to boycott parliamentary deliberations

In the view of the foregoing, CHRR and CEDEP call upon the opposition and all patriotic members of Parliament not to start any deliberations until the electoral reform bills have been included on the parliamentary agenda, otherwise we will conclude that they are together with the government in support of these compromised laws so that they can use them to their favour if they get to power. We also call upon Malawians to rise up and demand commitment from the government to present the bills.

Reforms to the electoral system are critical to free, fair and transparent elections as the country prepares for the 2019 general elections. We recall that both the Special Law Commission and Public Affairs Committee made a recommendation that Malawi should do away with the First-Past-The-Post system—which gives an unfair advantage to other regions of the country when electing presidents—and adopt the progressive 50+1 system. The new system recommends that the winning president must amass at least 50+ percent threshold of the national vote. This is very important to ensure that those in power are elected by a majority vote.

With less than two years to go before the polls, we cannot afford to entertain further delays in tabling this important bill. Therefore, we urge the government to rise above partisan interests and demonstrate commitment to table this bill without delay. There is no better time to do so than now.

Timothy Mtambo

Executive Director—CHRR

Gift Trapence

Executive Director—CEDEP