



**For immediate release**

**25<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**CHRR, YAS call for speedy release of taskforce report on reforming the system of allowances, procurements and employment contracts**

The Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) and the Youth and Society (YAS) wish to commend and congratulate the government on the release of the public sector systems review report, which contains various recommendations on reforming the government system of allowances, procurements and employment contracts. Undoubtedly, these reforms are long overdue.

We however wish to explicitly condemn the attempt by President Lazarus Chakwera to conceal the report and shroud this process in secrecy by failing to make the report public. The presidential press secretary, Brian Banda, is reported to have told journalists in Lilongwe on Monday, 24 May 2021 that the president will not disclose the details of the report and that the public will only be informed of decisions made on the recommendations at an appropriate time. The decision is inconsistent with section 37 of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, which states that “Every person shall have the right of access to all information held by the State or any of its organs at any level of Government in so far as such information is required for the exercise of his or her rights.” The decision also fails to pass the test of the Access to Information (ATI) Act, whose objective is to improve the flow of information from the government to citizens and ensure that citizens access the information held by the government. According to section 3(1)(2) of the ATI Act, the only information that is exempted by the Act is cabinet records and those of its committees and court records prior to conclusion of a matter.

We wish to remind the President and Tonse administration that the ATI Act was passed to allow the citizens to see into the decision-making of their government. When authorities make efforts to conceal decision-making processes, it serves only to undermine government’s transparency and accountability. It also closes the doors of mutual trust between citizens and their government.

While we understand that the President needs time to process the report, we disagree with the view expressed by the State house press team that this report is not of public interest. As long as it was funded by taxpayers' money, this report is of public interest and should be treated as such. Taxpayers paid for all the work that went into this report. It is, therefore, only fair and just that they are able to access it.

We further remind authorities that they hold public information not for themselves but as custodians of the public good and everyone has a right to access this information. When citizens are denied access to such information, they are denied their right as voters and taxpayers to hold their government to account and make informed decisions. We, therefore, call upon the President to ensure and facilitate the expeditious release of this report.

We urge authorities to desist from making statements and taking actions that may be construed as promoting a culture of government secrecy. Malawi has come a long way since the dark days of one party dictatorship when policy-making was the domain of the president and, to a small extent, party officials. That painful era is long gone. Malawi is a democracy now, with the rights to access to information and participate in decision-making enshrined in our Constitution. With these rights, days of closed door, one-man decision-making are over.

We, therefore, call upon President Chakwera and his government to respect the right to information by ensuring that citizens have access to the taskforce report. This is the only way that we, as citizens, will be able to make informed decisions about the report findings and hold the government to proper account on any policy decisions that will be made based on this report.

Signed by:



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