

## **PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE (PAC)**

### **Press Statement**

**Issued : 28 December, 2011**

The Public Affairs Committee (PAC) would like to express its observations on the Malawi's political and economic governance of the year 2011. Many political commentators have made their observations and PAC respects their views whether in positive or negative form. Our views are not targeting on personality issues of any particular individual nor any specific leadership as such. As PAC we would like to state the facts as they stand today.

#### **1. Political and Economic governance**

The year 2011 has been the worst year as far as economic and political governance is concerned. On the political front, several bad laws crept in our political landscape. These include: injunction laws, Section 46 which deals with the media, and search without warrant to name a few. While these laws have been directed to Law Commission by the government for review, it is crystal clear that the laws were unpopular amongst many stakeholders in Malawi. It is equally true that while these laws will be re-examined by the Law Commission, people feel that the review of such laws may take some time - an outcome that will be contrary to people's expectations. It is our view that these bad laws should have been repealed in line with people's demand.

On the economic front, we have observed the acute shortage of fuel and forex which are a life blood of economic activities. Lack of these products have slowed down economic activities to the extent that in the country's history Malawians have faced untold suffering. We also noted the acute shortage of drugs in hospitals forcing Malawians to purchase their own medicine in pharmacies in the towns and cities of Malawi. As PAC, we take the view that these developments are not as a result of Malawi being a landlocked country. After all, Malawi has not become landlocked today. During Muluzi's and Dr Banda's regime Malawi was a landlocked country, but we never had a crisis of this magnitude. The today's unprecedented challenges have gone beyond people's imagination.

## **2. Demonstrations**

On 20 July, 2011, civil society groups organized a mass demonstration in the major towns and cities of Malawi. This development led to the handing of a 20-point petition to the leadership demanding redress to issues of economic and political governance. PAC fully supports the issues highlighted in the petition. However, PAC remains saddened for the loss of life of those who were killed during the period of demonstration. MAY THEIR SOULS REST IN PEACE !. It is our sincere hope that those who authorized and those that took away people's lives will be brought to book. Human life is irreplaceable. While we could be busy working day and night to replace the damaged property but no one can replace lives that have been carelessly taken away. In view of this, Malawians should not quickly forget these incidents, and those who committed these acts must be held accountable. PAC would like to maintain its position that organizing peaceful demonstrations is a constitutional right which cannot be taken away from Malawians. It is our hope that the next demonstrations in Malawi will be handled in a democratic manner given that democracy is an on-going process.

## **3. National Dialogue**

PAC has been involved in the national dialogue through its secretariat. We would like to thank the UN for facilitating the dialogue in Malawi. The dialogue began in the month of August, 2011 soon after the postponement of the 17 August demonstration, and following a meeting held on 15 August at Capital hotel convened by the UN fact finding mission. Now, it is end of the year. PAC observes that the results from the dialogue may not be to people's satisfaction. The public believes that the negotiating teams seem to have different levels of mandate. However, we should appreciate that this dialogue emanated from the process of planning the 17 August demonstration which had its own dynamics. We are aware that the whole process of dialogue is always complex, and dynamics change now and again. Be that as it may, it is important to be clear whether the progress on dialogue will be based on resolutions reached or implementation of such resolutions. The latter will determine whether dialogue is based on the people's needs or not. We are of the view that the expedient implementation of resolution to the fullest in a dialogue process is vital. For as long as people continue to suffer from the same challenges that ignited dialogue, the process itself loses value and it becomes detached from the general public. At the end of the day, it becomes more justified by those who are involved rather than the people who look forward to solutions. PAC believes that any meaningful dialogue should take into account the suffering of the people. With the crisis we are in, it is a good path but not sufficient to deal with all the demands from Malawians. A multi-faceted approach is required.

## **4. The way forward**

Every Malawian knows that where we reached as a country, politically and economically, things have fallen apart. There are promises that things will improve. We welcome such promises. However, the position of PAC is that the problems in Malawi are not only fuel and

forex as other people would like us to believe. Even if fuel is available today, it does not mean that the retrogressive nature of our economy and political governance is solved. The 20 - Point petition of 2011 highlights several challenges Malawi faces . Let us not turn a blind eye to the obvious problems which everybody sees in this country. Let us learn to take responsibility because Malawians are suffering at the moment .

Having observed that dialogue has taken such a long time to deal with Malawi's challenges, PAC wishes to inform the public that it will resume its public policy influence and advocacy role in 2012 so that Malawians can voice out the way forward in collective fashion. We had to give way to dialogue in addressing Malawi's challenges. Now ,time has come to revert to advocacy for the realization of policy influence and political reforms as we approach 2014 .

Finally , we would like to appreciate the opening of Chancellor College following the lengthy discussions during the national dialogue. We believe more could have been achieved if we as a country seriously considered the challenges facing Malawi at an earliest stage . It is our hope that Malawians will enter the new year with strong resolutions as they seek sustainable solutions to Malawi's problems.

We wish all Malawians a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

GOD BLESS !

**Rev . Mac Donald Kadawati**

**PAC CHAIRPERSON**