

Malawi: Mass demonstration against amended media law

 By [Gregory Gondwe](#)

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The media law, endorsed by President Bingu wa Mutharika and the Malawi government, amending Section 46 of the Penal Code that allows the information minister to ban publications deemed contrary to public interest, has boomeranged.



The Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC) has joined other NGOs, opposition political parties and other civil society organisations in calling for nation-wide demonstrations on the law and other issues related to bad governance and economic mismanagement. The demonstrations have been scheduled for Wednesday, 20 July 2011.

While government has, for the past two weeks, been trying all it can to stop the demonstrations, the British government, which had its high commissioner expelled from Malawi for reporting back on the same issues, added salt on the injury when it announced that it has suspended aid to Malawi.

First phase toward mass demonstrations

A joint statement from the bodies that have organised the mass demonstrations have said this has been arranged as part of the people's constitutional right to express alarm regarding the current situation in Malawi. They say these demonstrations are the first phase towards the grand mass demonstrations set for 17 August 2011.

The theme of the demonstrations is: "Uniting for peaceful resistance against bad economic and democratic governance - a better Malawi is possible".

To deter people from taking part in the demonstrations, President Mutharika has organised what he is calling a public lecture at the state house on the same day where he intends to explain on issues surrounding the economic woes and his governance.

Former attorney general, Ralph Kasambara, who also heads opposition Congress of Democrats (CODE), has said all

patriotic Malawians need to demonstrate their frustration with the lack of leadership the present administration has shown so far. Kasambara reiterated that peaceful demonstration is a constitutional right which does not depend on the good intentions of the police or government.

He said it is incumbent upon the president and his administration to ensure that the said peaceful demonstration takes place in a free and fair manner without intimidation or threats from any forces or groupings supporting the present administration.

Friends of President Mutharika group formed

Already, a group calling itself Friends of President Mutharika has been parading on public television warning all demonstrators that they will be fought against in the street if they will go ahead with plans to demonstrate as scheduled.

On 14 July 2011, the UK secretary of state for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office William Hague gave an update to the UK parliament on the review of the UK's relations with Malawi following the expulsion of the British High Commissioner. In a Written statement on 28 April 2011, Hague also told the house that he had instructed the UK's foreign office to review the relation which started with retaliation by expelling Malawi's envoy to the UK.

"The review covered the full range of the UK's relations with Malawi, including migration, defence relations, and educational and cultural relations," he said.

"On the issue of UK aid to Malawi...the international development secretary has decided to halt all general budget support until progress has been made in economic management, but to continue the programmes which protect Malawi's many poor people," Hague said.

ABOUT GREGORY GONDWE

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