Zambia gives TV licence to Malawian operator

By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Malawi's former president Bakili Muluzi's aspirations to run Joy-TV alongside Joy FM radio, which were thwarted when Malawi government switched off the television broadcasting, has been given a lifeline by Zambian government.

Zambia's newly elected President Michael Sata has granted Malawi's former president a television broadcasting licence, giving Muluzi an opportunity to broadcast to Malawians but from the border district town of Chipata, Zambia.

In an interview with *The Daily Times* on Sunday 16 October 2011, Muluzi's son Atupele said he forwarded his request when he congratulated President Sata on his election. Atupele said he took advantage of the friendship between his father and President Sata who knows well how the situation is here.

Broadcasting equipment removed

In 2007, the Malawi government through the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) removed broadcasting equipment from Mpingwe Hill, a few months after Joy-TV went live, claiming that the operator had no licence, contrary to claims by the Muluzi family that insisted that they radio licence had an extension that also allowed them to operate a TV station.

But with the licence now, Muluzi said they will now be beaming its programmes from Chipata in Zambia via satellite.

Muluzi said he asked Sata if it was possible to allow them to broadcast from Chipata, it was then accepted and he even informed Malawi's High Commissioner David Bandawe of that development.

Zambia's newspaper, *The Post* quoted Sata as saying he permitted a request by a "Malawian opposition political party" to establish a broadcasting station in that country's Eastern Province. The Eastern Province of Zambia borders Mchinji and Kasungu districts of Malawi.

Sata who described Muluzi as a leader of an opposition [party] who runs a radio station in Malawi said he gave them permission to have a station in Chipata after Muluzi had requested for it.

Licence granted

The granting of a TV licence is expected to widen the diplomatic gap created after Sata came to power following his deportation by the current leadership in 2007 when he was an opposition leader. Malawi also declared him a prohibited

immigrant, a reason Sata used last week to refuse to attend the COMESA summit in Malawi.

Sata is quoted in *The Post* saying he considered the request as an investment and gave the Muluzis a nod.

"So you can have your Malawian radio and broadcast... after all they speak [Chi]Chewa so the people of Eastern Province will benefit," Sata is quoted as telling Bandawe.

Subsequent to its eventual closure, Joy-TV had a fierce fight with MACRA that insisted that they needed to issue them an appropriate radio and broadcasting licenses. On several occasions MACRA closed Joy Radio which was always opened by the courts.

Although MACRA has been advertising in the media, inviting potential investors to apply for a TV licence ever since 2004 when the current government came to power, no licence has been issued.

Commentators have accused government of deliberately doing this in order to suppress dissent on such other alternative TV stations, unlike the state controlled TV station run by Malawi Broadcasting Station (MBC) which operates as the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) propaganda mouth piece.

The young Muluzi who has declared that he will contest in the 2014 presidential elections is expected to use Joy-TV to strengthen his position as a candidate.

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