

Malawi cartoons in Germany exhibition

 By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Just when [Malawian cartoonists cried foul](#) after being left out in this year's Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-Malawi) best performance awards, the Germany government through its embassy in Lilongwe have brought them an online exhibition, where the German Embassy says it will pay respect to the art form of political cartoons in Malawi.

Through an [online display](#), the German Embassy Lilongwe invites people to go through a gallery of 20 cartoons published by Blantyre Newspapers Limited (BNL) and Nation Publications Limited (NPL) in 2011, and vote for the best. Voting opened on 1 March 2012 and will close on 31 March 2012.

The embassy is giving away an iPod Touch Nano 16GB to one lucky participant, although it says there are many other smaller prizes to be won. The voting process allows one vote per person only and will be according to prescribed terms and conditions.

Cartoons are never neutral

Commenting on the initiative, Malawi Germany Embassy press relations officer, Johannes Scharlau says caricatures and political cartoons are never neutral.

"They exaggerate, they accentuate, they are critical and opinionated and quite often they are simply over the top," said Scharlau in an interview with *The Daily Times*.

He said the idea of an exhibition was to create a platform to show several cartoons next to each other, and to give the audience the possibility to compare and judge them. He confirmed that all the cartoons were originally published in the various newspapers of media partners BNL and NPL throughout 2011.

"The Germany embassy selected 20 of them, and now we ask the visitors of our website to vote for the best cartoon of 2011. We hope that the exhibition can serve as a kind of retrospective of the last year and also that the voting process will inspire both the big names and emerging artists in the cartoon industry," explained Scharlau.

Why political cartoons?

Explaining why they decided to only exhibit political cartoons, Scharlau says politics is a broad subject and never short of news, and therefore attracts a lot of interest and commentary.

"Political cartoons attempt to take such a complex topic and reduce it to a few strokes of a pen and some words," he said.

He said although there were lots of cartoons about different subjects in 2011 as well, they thought of focusing on the political cartoons as most of the events portrayed in the cartoons concerned or interested most readers of those newspapers at that time.

"Also, Germany has a long tradition of political cartoons that reaches back to the protestant reformation and Martin Luther, who used visual propaganda that can be considered political cartoons," he said.

The message that goes together with the display seem to be in agreement with Scharlau as it says cartoons do not give us the long story; instead they deliver the punch line straight away.

"A good editorial cartoon will boil down a complex situation into one panel of visual art that does not need much text or explanation. It will serve as a biased commentary trying to affect the viewer's opinion," it says.

Provides a historical background

The exhibition website, which carries a historical background of political cartoons, cites Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who served as foreign minister and vice chancellor of Germany from 1974 to 1992, as a prime example of a respected statesman who accepted the liberal, critical, informative and entertaining disposition of cartoons.

It explains that during his political career he was featured in many cartoons including Genschman, where he saved the world as a Batman-style superhero who could fly by flapping a pair of grotesquely huge ears.

"This cheeky hint at his own rather prominent auricular features most likely did not please him very much. Nevertheless, he patronised cartoon exhibitions and even publicly bought cartoons that were making fun of him at an auction," it explains.

Adding that one might argue that with fame and power come the civil duty to accept jokes about oneself.

Cartoons to be auctioned

Following the online exhibition of Malawi's political cartoons, the original drawings of the five cartoons with the most votes will be framed and exhibited at an event at the German Ambassador's residence in Lilongwe. There will then be an auction of these five cartoons, and the proceeds will go to a good cause.

Some of such cartoons on display include the 'Puludzu' cartoon strip drawn by Haswell Kunyenje and 'Point of Order' drawn by Ralph Mawera.

[Vote for the best cartoon of 2011.](#)

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