

Malawi: Police ordered closure of radio stations - MACRA



By [Gregory Gondwe](#)

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The Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority (MACRA) has disclosed to the media that the police ordered them to switch off three private radio stations, Capital Radio, Joy FM and MIJ FM which is ironically owned by government-run journalist school, the Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ).



On Thursday, 21 July 2011, MACRA shutdown the three radio stations for five hours with the communication regulator saying it was due to security reasons following violent pro-democracy demonstrations that erupted into violence where 18 people were shot dead by the police.

MACRA director general Charles Nsaliwa said the police asked them to shut down the radios because they were failing to quell the situation since the radio stations were covering the developments surrounding the violent demonstrations live.

He said they had talked to the radio stations and asked them to stop live broadcasts and while others complied, some never conformed to their request.

Warrant to stop transmission

"We got a warrant to stop transmission of those who were continuing with live broadcast because this was inciting violence," he said.

But in an interview with *Sunday Times*, Capital FM MD Al Osman said they protested against stopping live broadcasts because it was denying the public their right to information.

"There was no proof that what we were reporting was affecting people negatively," he said. He said as a radio they provide information to people so that they assist them to make decisions.

"We were not telling people what action to take. With due respect to MACRA and authorities, the fears were misplaced. We are responsible and we are concerned with the welfare of the people," the weekly quoted Osman as saying.

Due to the blackout, Osman who owns the Capital Radio said they have lost substantial revenue as well as the goodwill of their listeners and advertisers.

Almost similar sentiments were also expressed by Joy FM station manager Lloyd Zawanda who dismissed MACRA's claims that they contacted the radio stations before shutting them down.

No communication from MACRA

"Normally when we do something wrong MACRA writes us but on this one there is no communications whatsoever," said Zawanda whose radio has been closed on several occasions.

Joy Radio which is owned by former President Dr. Bakili Muluzi says at first they thought this was an ordinary blackout and they rushed their engineer to their transmitter in Mpingwe, Blantyre only to be shocked with what they learnt.

"They had switched off our transmitter and left words with security personnel there that if we wanted to know the reason we needed to go to police but we declined since we are answerable to MACRA and not police," he said.

Local and international bodies lashed at MACRA for their action which they all concluded is tantamount to an infringement on people's rights to access to information.

ABOUT GREGORY GONDWE

Gregory Gondwe is a Malawian journalist who started writing in 1993. He is also a media consultant assisting several international journalists pursuing assignments in Malawi. He holds a Diploma and an Intermediate Certificate in Journalism among other media-related certificates. He can be contacted on gregorygondwe@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter at @Kalipochi.

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