



TWO YEARS OF TONSE ALLIANCE'S TALK SHOW

Our rating of the Tonse Alliance Government in the last two years: 3/10

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Background: Two years ago, Malawians lined up to the polls and decided to change how their nation was being governed. On June 23 2020, Malawians voted out Peter Mutharika and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and ushered in Lazarus Chakwera and the Tonse Alliance in a historic court-ordered fresh presidential election. The elections only happened thanks to a professional and fiercely independent Judiciary; the personal sacrifices of certain individuals and groups and, most importantly, the revolutionary spirit that coursed through the hearts and souls of Malawians. A citizenry that was feed-up with corruption, nepotism, executive arrogance, governance decay, human rights abuses, economic stagnation and deteriorating standards in public service delivery, especially in the areas of health, education, water and sanitation. Two years later, while the Tonse Administration has fulfilled some of the promises made during the campaign, the administration has failed to live up to the expectations of Malawians with visible signs of economic misdirection, ever-rising unemployment and cost of essential goods resulting in inflation that has left Malawians poorer than they were when we started this Tonse journey to Canaan. Hereunder, we underline the major areas that the Tonse Government must work on if it is to retain its legitimacy to govern.

1. Indecisiveness and slow decision-making

The hallmark of the Tonse Alliance administration is inconsistencies, slowness and indecisiveness. For instance, Malawians were promised the Cabinet would be assessed within the first six months and non-performers would summarily be dismissed. But two years down the line, the assessment is not forthcoming. For months, some statutory bodies have people in acting capacities while embassies are operating without Ambassadors. The problem is emanating from the Office of the President and Cabinet which has been allowed to operate at its own pace, caging decisions and holding the country at ransom. At this pace, the country will not develop and it will take millions of years to reach the promised land.



2. Malawians in Economic Pain

All major fundamentals show that 24 months after the revolution, the economic situation—at both macro and micro levels—has deteriorated because the economy has been mismanaged. One just has to look at the foreign currency market to understand how Malawians are worse off. The rapid depletion of forex has pushed the Malawi kwacha to depreciate by around 75 percent over the past 24 months, contributing sharply to the rising cost of living and general economic pain Malawians are feeling right now.

Meanwhile, the Tonse administration sits on the largest budget deficit on record amid piling public debt on the back of largely unproductive spending. The high levels of debt, both foreign and domestic, is astoundingly high, hovering around K5.8 trillion. While it is true that this debt has accrued from past regimes, the current administration has contributed to it too through wasteful spending and general lack of financial discipline. A good example of wasteful spending is the Affordable Inputs Programme (AIP), which has seen government pumping billions of hard-earned taxpayers' money into the programme despite advice from economic and agricultural experts that the programme is unsustainable. With 5 million Malawians facing hunger this year despite the government spending over K100 billion of taxpayer money in funding the programme, the continuation of the programme exposes the levels of Executive Arrogance in the Tonse Administration.

To curb this trend, we urge government to restrain its huge spending appetite; cut domestic and international travel and get rid of the AIP and other unsustainable programmes. In place of the AIP, we urge government to define a clear policy on crop diversification and also encourage livestock production which continues to fall by the way side. The expansion of irrigation farming and revamping of extension services remain political rhetoric and we believe these could help revamp the economy if properly managed. And to show seriousness, we urge the President to trim his cabinet to 20 ministers and reduce his advisors. A nation that is reeling on its knees cannot afford to shoulder the burden of having over 30 cabinet ministers and a horde of presidential advisors with their huge appetites for travelling and allowances on a daily basis.

3. One Million Jobs and NEEF Loans

Two years on, there is no evidence that the Tonse Alliance administration has created the one million jobs they promised Malawians within 12 months. Moreover, the government has



not even issued a plan for job creation, making the promise the biggest campaign hoax of all time. Even the disbursement of loans to women and youths and other micro-entrepreneurs under the National Economic Empowerment Fund (NEEF) remains murky as political interference rears its ugly head once again and funding to the initiative only goes in drips, leaving many young men and women disappointed. We so believe that these loans, if administered properly, will help create new SMEs and more middle income earners which are crucial for the survival of our economy.

4. Corruption, fraud fight vs clearing the rubble

In his early major speeches, President Chakwera vowed to disinfect Malawi to remove the stench of corruption and fraud, saying the evil twins are largely responsible for Malawi's retarded development. But the gulf between the rhetoric and the reality of the levels of suspected corruption is like day and night. The ACB report on businessperson Zuneth Sattar's report has further dented the image of the Tonse Alliance, which came to power on the higher moral ground of ending corruption. To this day, there is rampant suspected corruption, abuse of public resources as well as gapping loopholes in public financial systems that have resulted in the loss of Billions of public funds.

For instance:

- The Tonse Administration has witnessed over one large-scale heist in which a large chunk of the K6.2 Billion that was allocated to the fight against Covid-19 was allegedly abused with little action taken against most of those involved.
- The Administration has failed to audit the K17.2 billion of taxpayers' money and more than K300 billion in Covid-19 donor aid despite promising to do so. Actually, a recent audit by the National Audit Office indicates that K3.5 billion of the K17.2 billion is unaccounted for. Yet, two months after this report was issued, no one has been taken to task and no arrests have been effected. It is business as usual.

In the last two years that the Tonse Administration has been in power, the political leadership has boasted about increased funding to ACB, yet the institution has persistently complained of delays in funding disbursements, which have weakened their operations. The administration has also bragged about the planned financial crimes court, yet two years down the line the much-touted courts are nowhere to be seen. It is also sad to note that the Administration has failed to fully utilise action plans and recommendations proposed by



various experts on ending corruption. Since Cashgate, there have been numerous conferences on ending corruption, all of which have come up with recommendations and action plans on addressing corruption and yet the Tonse Administration has not tapped into such reports to enhance the fight against corruption.

5. Public Sector Reforms

Despite all the zeal and fanfare that surrounded the Public Sector Reforms, the programme seems to have resulted in a stillbirth as President Chakwera seems unwilling to implement the recommendations that we presented to him by Vice President Saulos Chilima and his team. What is also disheartening is that, despite funding the exercise, the nation will never know the contents of the Public Sector Reforms report not its recommendation as the President has decided to keep the document close to his chest. As such, we are still at where the point of departure when this process started—the public sector is still in disarray and still performing below par despite all the promises and the efforts spent in trying to correct the problem. This is despite the President acknowledging from the onset that the public sector is the heart of government and a demotivated public sector will sabotage the leadership.

6. Nepotism

The reason why Malawians voted the DPP out of government was mainly because of the party's arrogance and nepotistic tendencies. However, we have noted, with great distress, the entrenchment of the same culture in the Tonse Alliance Government. For example, public appointments are highly skewed towards the Tonse's political base of the Central Region at the expense of those who come from Southern and Northern Regions. We also condemn the tendency of rewarding friends, relatives and party cadres with positions that are not being competed for without giving a fair chance to other fellow citizens who are better qualified for the job. This practice must stop as it is discriminatory and denies Malawians equal opportunity for employment.

8. Weak Opposition

We bemoan the collapse of the Opposition. The DPP—which is supposed to be the main opposition party—is being torn apart by internal fights, rendering it too ineffective to provide the necessary checks and balances as well as offer alternative policy options to Tonse Administration's handling of national issues. The United Democratic Front (UDF) has been



folded into a briefcase with little or no influence on the country's national affairs. In this regard, HRDC calls on Malawians to be vigilant in order to ensure that Tonse government lives to people's expectations in fulfilling its electoral promises.

9. Shrinking civic space

It is quite unfortunate that we seem to have a government that takes pleasure in passing laws that restrict people's freedoms. Last year, we saw the President assenting to the Labour Relations Amendment Bill, which restricts the freedom of workers to hold strikes. This year, we have seen the President assenting to the controversial NGO Amendment Bill, which violates a number of fundamental rights, including the constitutionally-guaranteed right to freedom of association. What is particularly concerning in all this is the way the President has consistently ignored legitimate concerns and gone ahead to assent to such bad laws.

During the two years of the Tonse administration, we have also seen increased arrests of online users and independent journalists for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we call upon the Tonse Alliance Government not to take Malawians for granted. They should rather walk the talk on their electoral promises. The government needs to start doing things the right way by getting rid of dead wood within its ranks and file which is stifling progress. The President must reshuffle his team and bring people who are capable rather than roping in friends and cronies that have self-interests rather than that of the country. We call upon the Administration to listen to the cries of its citizens who are heavily burdened by poor economic policies that are directly resulting in the rising cost of living.

Long live Democracy

Gift Trapence | National Chairperson

Michael Kaiyatsa – Interim Vice Chairperson | Madalitso Banda – (Regional Chair – Eastern Region) | Masauko Thawe – (Regional Chair – Southern Region) | Walita Moya – (Regional Chair –Northern Region).