

# Government moving in the right direction on local Polls



THE much anticipated local government elections would be conducted in May next year, the Electoral Commission (EC) has confirmed.

According to the authorities, the polls were postponed due to, among other reasons, financial constraints.

EC spokesperson Fegus Lipenga said in an interview yesterday that government has asked the commission to come up with the budget for the polls.

"Government has written the commission to come up with the budget for the local polls, so the commissioners will start working on that," he said.

However, Lipenga could not give the exact date of the polls. But Section 147 sub section 5 of the Republican Constitution says that local government elections shall take place in the third week of May in the year following the year of general elections of the National Assembly.

Another part of the same sub section 5 states that "provided that where it is not applicable for the polling to be held in the third week of May, the polling shall be held on a day, within seven days from expiration of the third week of May appointed by the Electoral Commission".

Pan African Civic Educators Network (Pacenet) Executive Director Steve Duwa has hailed government for its commitment to hold the local polls in May next year.

"Local assemblies were working illegally due to the absence of local councillors, so this is good news," he said.

According to Duwa, the failure by government to hold the polls in 2005 denied the country's citizenry the right to take part in local governance.

"Development activities in their areas were just being imposed on them," he said.

Duwa also said his organization would continue to advocate for the 50-50 representation of councillors in local assemblies.

Institute for Policy Interaction (IPI) Executive Director Rafiq Hajat corroborated Duwa's sentiments on the development.

"This is a welcome development because the Constitution is being respected," he said. He was, however, of the view that next time the country should conduct tripartite elections.

MALAWI will finally hold local government elections next year. This is good news for local governance, which has suffered since 2005, the year councillors elected in 2000 ceased to hold office.

It is understandable that the polls were not held in 2005 due to financial constraints. This was just a year after the country had held presidential and parliamentary elections, which cost a lot of money.

Section 147, sub section 5 of the Republican Constitution stipulates that local government elections shall take place in the third week of May in the year following the year of general elections of the National Assembly.

But the polls could still have been held in 2006" and 2007 had Parliament done what it was supposed to-amend the electoral law.

Why the last Parliament was not able to do that is one of the many sad things that will go down to dent the history of the country's Parliament. We only have the opposition to blame for turning the last Parliament into an arena for flexing their political 'muscles against a weaker government side in the House.

As a result-and we say this with a lot of regret-Parliament failed to transact most of the business that was brought before it because of bickering over petty political issues.

Thank God we can now breathe a sigh of relief that that dark era is now behind us. We can only hope and pray that never shall the Malawi Parliament ever be subjected to such atrocities again.

It is in this light that we want to commend government for asking the Electoral Commission to start preparing for the local polls.

The last Parliament denied the country of a very important democratic and local governance process, which would 'have ushered in councillors.

Councillors play a very crucial role in initiating and coordinating development activities with the grassroots. '

Councillors are especially important within the framework of the Decentralisation Programme government has been implementing for a number of years now. The aim of this programme is for the Central Government to devolve power to local assemblies with a view to stimulate and~ accelerate development by involving the~ people who are the beneficiaries to articulate their aspirations and priorities.

We also want to pat government on the back for showing the willingness to respect the Constitution.