

HUMAN RIGHTS IN MALAWI

ISSUE

After several decades of dictatorship, respect for human rights is being established satisfactorily in Malawi, although not without some difficulties.

BACKGROUND

Realizing that it was brought to power on the strength of a reaction against the many abuses of the previous regime, the government of Malawi has taken care to exhibit a sincere respect for fundamental rights and civic freedoms. It has emphasized restoration of the economy, education and institutional improvement.

A few cases of harassment of the opposition by judicial means have been cited. Thus, the leaders of the Democratic Party and of the Congressional Party have faced various court actions during the year. The government reestablished the Press Trust without allowing the project to be debated sufficiently in the Parliament. On the plus side, it was satisfying to see that in the by-elections, the AFORD and the UDF, both of which originally developed along regional lines, succeeded in electing candidates beyond their traditional areas of influence.

Some delays have occurred in the process of decentralizing, which is keeping democracy from taking root in the smallest communities. In so far as good government is concerned, a number of ministers have not yet agreed to let the state of their assets become public knowledge, and a few cases of corruption have been brought to light.

A bill that would force newspapers to reveal their sources and to identify their sponsors was roundly criticized as censorship by the local press. The bill was not passed. On the other hand, the government continues to monopolize the electronic media (radio only), having made the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation an instrument of the party in power, for all practical purposes.

One of the strong points of the establishment of constitutional law in Malawi has been the independence of the judiciary, exhibited in a few cases where the judges have handed down verdicts different from those that the government would like to have seen, in particular by dismissing the murder charges against ex-dictator Kamuzu Banda and colleagues, for lack of sufficient evidence.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada encourages the government of Malawi to continue rebuilding the country on a strong democratic basis.

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