# MALAWI PEACE AND UNITY COMMISSION

*Fostering Peace and Unity through Communication*

# COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

## 2024 – 2027

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## FOREWORD

*Since 2012 Malawi undertook a long, complex and ultimately successful process of establishing and strengthening an inclusive peace architecture. The peace infrastructure envisions well established early warning and conflict prevention capacities at the national and district levels, as well as the establishment an independent Malawi Peace and Unity Commission.*

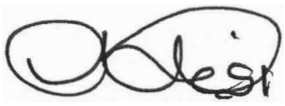
*Collective effort resulted in the launch of the National Peace Policy in October 2017, followed by the establishment, in late 2023, of an inclusive, independent and decentralized Peace and Unity Commission to oversee national peacebuilding efforts, guide strategy, and coordinate state and non-state actors in the field.*

*In recognition of communication as an integral part of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, we intend to invent in public information and communication through the development of the first Malawi Peace and Unity Communication Strategy.*

*The communication strategy is a guiding document for the commission and all stakeholders to implement a unified and cohesive communication plan and allow for focused interaction with different partners. It is my hope that this communication strategy will facilitate the creation of of space that nurtures dialogue and exchange of ideas with which to transform and mitigate conflicts.*

*It is my belief that the communication strategy will play a critical role in increasing knowledge, changing attitude and encouraging practices that foster peace in the country.*

*We are grateful to UNDP for the financial support towards the formulation of this strategy.*



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**CHAIRPERSON**

**MALAWI PEACE AND UNITY COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON**

## 2. PREFACE

*This document was developed with the support from the United Nations Development Programme Peacebuilding Fund Project. The Malawi Peace and Unity Commission (MPUC) acknowledges with profound thanks both technical and financial support from UNDP.*

*The MPUC is specifically indebted to various participants who took part in interviews, consultative meetings and the validation session to inform and shape this.*

*In this respect, it is our sincere hope that this communication strategy will facilitate unity of effort and provide the foundation for the achievement of sustainable peace and unity, and a peaceful and prosperous Malawi.*

## 3. BACKGROUND

This communication strategy has been formulated to support the newly formed Malawi Peace and Unity Commission (MPUC) in achieving its strategic objectives and mandate as the highest umbrella body and focal point for promoting unity, peacebuilding, and the use of amicable conflict prevention, management, and resolution mechanisms in Malawi.

The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi stipulates the need to safeguard the country's relative peace through a commitment to resolving disputes through the adoption *'of mechanisms by which differences are settled through negotiation, good offices, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration.*

Likewise, sustainable peace has been recognised, under Enabler 3 of Malawi Vision 2063, as being crucial for the creation of a sound, competitive and equitable environment for socio-economic development. It is the collective will of the people of Malawi to maintain a peaceful nation that attracts and retains investors and provides access to justice and effective remedies, including alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms.

The Commission is a creation of the Peace and Unity Act (2022) to be an independent, non-partisan, and impartial body that oversees and integrates indigenous and traditional peacebuilding methods. Communication will be at the centre of the work by MPUC since the whole peacebuilding continuum hinges on effective PR and communication.

### 3.1. INTERNAL CONTEXT

Coming out of the newly passed Peace and Unity Act (2022), MPUC is in its formative years. As such, this communication strategy comes into effect when the secretariat is yet to be fully established. The Commission's corporate identity and communication systems are both under development. Implementation of this strategy, therefore, will heavily rely on the Commissioners' active involvement with support from the National Coordinator. Technical support will also be expected from other Government Ministries and Departments, including development partners such as the UNDP.

Nonetheless, utilisation of the communication function to enable the Commission to deliver on its mandate, raise its profile, claim its rightful place in the peace architecture and strengthen links with other stakeholders will have to start and cannot wait until the Commission has all required structures. More so, as the country heads into the 2025 General Election, the Commission has an opportunity to play an important role.

## 3.2. EXTERNAL CONTEXT

Malawi heads to the polls in September 2025, and political tension and violence are likely to erupt. In addition, the harsh economic conditions, coupled with high unemployment and pressure on land and other resources, are some of the drivers of conflicts at family, community and national levels.

Stakeholders have big expectations from the Commission as they hope that it will foster peace and coordinate activities in the peacebuilding sector. However, some quarters feel threatened by its creation. They think it has come to replace them by taking charge of conflict prevention and dispute resolution initiatives. In other words, some have serious concerns (indeed for some outright fear) that with the passage of the Peace and Unity Act and the creation of the MPUC, they would be made redundant. Considering this recurring concern from actors who are critical stakeholders, it is apparent that the Commission uses communication to increase understanding of its roles and establish positive working relationships with other stakeholders.

The relative peace that Malawians have enjoyed is evidently under threat on multiple fronts. It will be critical to sensitise the leaders and citizens on various forms of structural violence that permeate society and the need to utilise alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and conflict-sensitive programmes and interventions.

Technology, the internet, social media and artificial intelligence have the potential to be used as tools for creating disunity through the rapid spread of fake news, propaganda and other divisive messages. On the other hand, they can foster unity through using trusted voices, early warning, combating fake news and spreading peace messages, particularly among young people. The Commission has to quickly start using these tools and channels through well-thought-out communication initiatives and campaigns.

## 4. BROAD COMMUNICATION AIMS

The FOUR broader communication aims are as follows:

i) **VISIBILITY** – The Commission will take appropriate measures to raise awareness about its existence, establish a strong identity and brand presence for key stakeholders and citizens to know about its existence

**ii)** **CONFLICT PREVENTION & PEACE PROMOTION** – The Commission must be proactive to reduce tensions, educate various publics about the concept of peace and set up and promote early warning and reporting mechanisms. As much as possible, the commission seeks to effectively and efficiently address misinformation, disinformation and fake news related to peace and unity.

iii) **PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION** – The Commission will establish partnerships with various sections, groups and other infrastructures for peace to inspire trust and confidence to build their capacity and establish working relationships that ultimately enable the Commission to achieve its mandate.

iv) **CAPACITY BUILDING –** As communication is essential in all aspects of conflict prevention and peace-building work, we will build the capacity of the MPUC Commissioners and Secretariat in communication management, conflict-sensitive media handling, personal branding and communication awareness in order to achieve values of integrity, respect, independence, impartiality and inclusivity. The commission would like to create and maintaining a good reputation - as a trusted source for peacebuilding information and advice.

## 5. SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

**i)** To raise awareness of the Commission and its mandate and activities among key stakeholder groups such as Malawians >16 years old, traditional and faith leaders, central and local government leaders and special interest groups to at least over 50 per cent of any sampled population by the end of 36 months (2027).

**ii)** To reduce tension in Malawian society by reaching over 90 per cent of adult Malawians with information about the necessity of keeping peace and resolving differences amicably. This will be confirmed by a 30 per cent increase, year-on-year from the end of 2025, in enquiries, reports and submissions to the Commission and referrals to other peace infrastructures.

**iii)** To build trust by strengthening partnerships through an increase in engagement with pre-existing peace infrastructures and other important peace and unity interlocutors, evidenced through a national peace outreach campaign that covers all districts by December 2026.

**iv)** To enhance the credibility of the Commission through building capacity in communication management, conflict-sensitive media handling, personal branding and communication awareness for Commission staff, to be achieved through monthly Communication check-ins between the Secretariat and Commissioners, development of a communication handling manual for Commissioners & capacity building sessions at least once every six months.

## 6. CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS & COMMUNICATION POSTURE

The Commission is the highest umbrella body and focal point for promoting unity, peacebuilding and the use of amicable conflict prevention, management and resolution mechanisms in Malawi.

It is expected to be independent, non-partisan and impartial.

For MPUC to effectively deliver on its mandate and win the trust of all key stakeholders and Malawians at large, its communication activities would have to be well-thought-out and all implications and unintended consequences clearly thought through. For these reasons, the Commission will strive to adopt the following factors and posture:

a) MPUC Commissioners and staff will be mindful of what they do and say privately and publicly since it has implications for peace and future dialogue and mediation initiatives. Their words and actions shall embody the values of integrity, respect, independence, impartiality and inclusivity.
b) The commission shall be proactive in its communications and use appropriate channels for any given issue.
c) The Commission will endeavour to be inclusive by working with the relevant and most appropriate good offices and infrastructures in conflict prevention and management, or it risks being seen in a negative light by other stakeholders.
d) The Commission will place top priority on issues of diversity and inclusivity in all its communications – making sure gender, youth and the interest of other people with special needs are consistently considered/factored in all communications.
e) The communication function will be prioritised and placed at the highest level in the Commission's organogram so that communication considerations on any given issue are woven in at the planning stage of any intervention.

# 7. AUDIENCES & CHANNELS

Audiences for this strategy have been segmented according to MPUC's strategic priorities as follows:

| SEGMENT | TARGET AUDIENCES | CHANNELS |
|---|---|---|
| **1ST TIER** | Political Leaders, Community Leaders, Traditional Leaders, Faith Leaders, Journalists & Media Houses, NGOs and CSOs involved in peacebuilding matters, Youth Groups, Women Groups, Men's Groups, | ▪ Face-to-face meetings<br>▪ Direct mail (email lists)<br>▪ Press briefings and conferences<br>▪ Social media events |
| **2ND TIER** | Academia, Development Partners, Research Think Tanks, MDAs, other NGOs and Relief Organisations, Private Sector bodies, Trade Unions, Professional Bodies, Courts, Police, Arm's Length bodies (MHRC, Ombudsman etc); foreign peace building institutions | ▪ Bulletins/Newsletter<br>▪ Workshops/Events<br>▪ Face-to-Face Meetings<br>▪ Owned channels – website and social media channels<br>▪ Blogs, Op-Eds |
| **3RD TIER** | Malawian Citizens <16 years<br>Malawian Citizens >16 years<br>People Living with Disabilities | ▪ IEC materials distributed in communities<br>▪ Traditional mass media<br>▪ Outdoor advertising<br>▪ Social media<br>▪ Theatre, events, meetings (community forums)<br>▪ Bulk SMS |

## 8. STRATEGY – BIG IDEA

For the messages to achieve optimal communication effects, this is what the Commission will do:

- It will use an integrated communication approach by combining various communication methods that are most effective and efficient for specific groups of people at specific times. The Commission will use direct and indirect methods of communication where necessary, and will use modern channels of communication, including having a social media presence.
- The Commission will work with credible messengers and influencers to deliver messages, including third-party voices.
- The Commission will be sensitive to timing and other factors and will promote collective messages from peace actors over solo messages in some bigger issues.
- The commission will invest energies in early warning to detect and diffuse tension.
- The commission will endeavour to be responsive and neutral in its communication.
- The commission will seek to be an authority in peace matters through regular publishing of reports to keep stakeholders informed of its activities having a robust early warning system and response mechanism.

## 9. KEY MESSAGES

Below are some proposed key messages for specific groups of people:

| | |
|---|---|
| Various stakeholders >> | ***"No Development Without Peace"*** |
| Malawian Citizens >> | ***"We can have unity in diversity"*** |
| | ***"Peace and Unity will take the country forward"*** |
| | ***"No issue is too difficult to resolve. Contact MPUC for assistance"*** |
| Development partners >> government and private sector | "***Invest in Peace for a Prosperous Malawi"*** |
| Peace actors>> | ***"The Malawi Peace and Unity Commission is the highest umbrella body for promoting peace, conflict prevention and management."*** |
| | ***"The Commission coordinates conflict prevention, management and resolution efforts"*** |
| Media >> | ***"Responsible journalism fosters Peace"*** |
| Providers of services>> | ***"Transparent service delivery fosters peace and unity"*** |

# 10. COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIPS

To successfully implement this communication strategy, the Commission will collaborate with several stakeholders to leverage bigger communication resources or ensure that messages are amplified. Some (definitely not all) of the potential partners are listed below:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Department of Peace and National Unity**<br>**Ministry of Information and Civic Education**<br>**District Information Officers** | For extra communication resources including personnel and surge support<br><br>For amplification of the Commission's messages |
| **UN, UNDP, Ireland** | Communication volunteers, Communication resources and expertise |
| **PAC, CCJP and other Peace Actors** | Message Amplification, Joint messages, Joint missions. |
| **Universities, think tanks, PR Society** | Joint research; communication interns |
| **Private sector** | Fundraising |
| **Professional bodies** | For mainstreaming of peace and unity issues into other professional groups |
| **Media bodies such as MISA, Media Council, Media Clubs in Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu** | To faster dissemination of updates, for support in constructive reporting of peace-related matters |

# 11. IMPLEMENTATION

The Commission's Secretariat and the Commissioners will work hand in hand to ensure the implementation of this strategy. There will be a need to identify a temporary communication specialist or volunteer to support with developing a comprehensive work plan, setting up of channels, events planning and creation of communication materials. Being a new organisation, it is important to set up foundational systems and start with simpler activities before moving on to bigger projects and complex activities. Below is the initial 6-month implementation that will facilitate a smooth takeover of the Communications function at the Commission.

| Priorities | Outputs | November 2024 to April 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| **Raise Awareness** | Create 3 Social media channels (facebook, Twitter (X) and Instagram) and a website by Feb 2025<br><br>Develop information Banners/outdoor materials about MPUC's mandate and contact information by March<br><br>Formulate a social media strategy by Jan 2025<br><br>Set up help lines/emails by Jan 2025<br><br>Media calls /Guest Interviews in main national and regional media | Use the first 6 months of the strategy to launch MPUC's channels.<br><br>Make introductory calls (courtesy calls) and working visits to various national and community media outlest and other key stakeholders in issues of peacebuilding (Target: top 5 national, top 3 regional outlets) |
| **Reduce Tension/Conflict Prevention** | Create 2 (pre and post 2024 election) peace messages in at least 6 main languages spoken in Malawi (Chichewa, English, Chitumbuka, Sena, Lomwe, Tonga)<br><br>Create information IEC materials on alternative dispute resolution avenues & unity in at least 6 main languages<br><br>Develop a calendar of events/national and international days that are of interest to MPUC<br><br>Set up a conflict early warning system that incorporates all existing 12 DPUCs | Deploy peace messages through various channels<br><br>Develop and pre-test IEC materials<br><br>Develop plans for specific events<br><br>Launch the early warning systems and other new peace committees<br><br>Coordinate national peace messages by groups of politicians, chiefs, young people and others ahead of 2025 elections |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Stakeholder Engagement** | Mapping of peace actors across Malawi<br><br>Develop of a stakeholder engagement plan<br><br>Digital landscape analysis of peace actors | At least 6 (3 per region before and after 2025 general election)<br>Public and private national outreach<br>Joint peace events<br>2 x Social media events and campaigns ( 1 pre-election and another post election) |
| **Capacity Building** | Conduct a skills audit of MPUC staff<br><br>Development of a communication (and negotiation) handbook for MPUC staff | Quarterly Training on media and communication management for MPUC staff and commissioners/ Crisis Communication/ negotiation and conflict resolution |

# 12. RESOURCES FOR THE STRATEGY

The Commissioners are the faces of the Commission led by the Chair. These will be responsible for the overall direction of the strategy.

Day-to-day planning and implementation of the strategy will be supervised by the National Coordinator (Director General of the MPUC), who will work closely with the Communication Specialist in identifying resources for the strategy.

The Communication Specialist will lead the implementation and periodic reviews of the strategy.

As the Commission is still in the process of setting a secretariat, it can draw support from other partners as listed in Section 10 such the Department of Peace and National Unity, the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, District Information Officers, Development Partners (such UN, UNDP, Ireland), PAC, CCJP and other Peace Actors

The commission will consider using communication and PR interns from the Ministry of Labour and departments of communication at Mzuzu University and MUBAS (Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences) to support with routine social media, media monitoring, event management and media relations tasks.

# 13. RISKS AND MITIGATION

| | |
|---|---|
| i) No Communication specialist to drive implementation of the strategy | MPUC can call on partners to support with initial activities / MPUC can get a Volunteer and request for technical support from development partners |
| ii) Lack for funding for the communication initiatives. | Rely on partners, leverage funding from other pots e.g.Elections Basket Fund |
| iii) Unexpected crisis before the Commission is fully up on its feet | Renewed interest on MPUC to deal with the crisis might unlock resources. |
| iv) Accusations of MPUC staff and Commissioners being compromised and biased. | Enforcement and adherence to MPUC Code of Conduct (as laid out in Regulations of Peace and Unity Act) |
| v) Misinformation and fake news against the commission | Set up of early warning/Robust internal communication system (e.g. setting up of a communication forum between commissioners and secretariat for real-time discussion of strategies to any developments) |

# 14. INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

To ascertain the effectiveness of the strategy, the commission will adopt an agile framework for continuous assessment, rather than a linear evaluation, by tracking the number of M&E Indicators as follows:

a) Tracking of basic metrics

Indicators such as the number of media events, engagements, and press/media statements undertaken in a quarter or half-year.

The Commission will conduct daily monitoring of press coverage and social media mentions to understand how messages are landing.

Some of the online analytics tools to be used include:

- Google Alerts – use to monitor specific content on the web
- Brandwatch – social media listing tool
- Google Analytics – monitor usage of the website
- Hootsuite – monitor content across all social media channels
- Simply Measured – to pull out social media reports
- Twitter Analytics – monitor your Twitter (now called X) page
- Hashtagify – free hashtag tracking tool
- Iconosquare – Instagram analytics

b) Periodic Surveys

A short survey will be undertaken mid-way through the implementation of the strategy to find out about MPUC's visibility across the country.

Generally, periodic perception surveys are a requirement for an institution such as MPUC in order to gauge the level of trust from stakeholders and to be able to adjust the strategy as necessary.

c) Campaign Evaluation

For specific campaigns that the Commission will be undertaking, we will track **Inputs, Outputs**, **Outtakes**, **Outcomes and Impact** as per the standard integrated communication evaluation framework set by the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC)[1]

| **Inputs** | **Outputs** | **Outtakes** | **Outcomes** | **Organisational Impact** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| E.g Content Development | No. Of articles or broadcasts or events | Awareness of issues | Advocacy by third parties | Uptake of service provided |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

**Learning and Innovation**

We will intrinsically link the evaluation process to continuous learning and improvement by embedding **learning and innovation** into the evaluation cycle to capture strategic learnings that drive new ideas, learnings and improvements that can be taken forward.

[1] https://amecorg.com/amecframework/framework/interactive-framework/

# DATE FOR NEXT REVIEW OF THIS STRATEGY

OCTOBER 2027