

ODPP the most transparent—Misa

TIMES REPORTER

A SURVEY by Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) Malawi Chapter on access to information of six public institutions has found the Office of the Director of Public Procurement (ODPP) to be the most transparent.

The survey was conducted between July 21 and August 28 this year to determine the most transparent and most secretive public institution in 2009 based on content on its website and response to physical requests for information.

For emerging the most open institution, Misa Malawi presented ODPP with a Golden Key award while the Golden Padlock award has gone to Ministry of Health.

Misa Malawi National Director Aubrey Chikungwa said the survey was conducted as part of this year's commemoration of Right to Know Day which falls on September 28 worldwide.

The day aims to promote citizen's access to public held information.

"Right to Know is a basic human right that underpins all other human rights such as freedom of expression which rely on availability of adequate information to make informed opinions," he said.

Human Rights Consultative Committee Chairperson Undule Mwakasungura appealed to

various stakeholders to work together and support the Access to Information legislation which, he said, will not only benefit the media, but the public as well.

Representative of the ODPP, Isaac Chilima, said the ODPP believes that information in its custody belongs to the taxpayers who are the public and makes sure they are informed at all times.

"With this vote of confidence, it will become our second nature to give out information to those who need it. Some public institutions fear giving out information because they don't know how it will be used, but that mindset will change," he said.

Media Council of Malawi Executive Director Baldwin Chiyamwaka said giving out awards such as the Golden Key and Golden Padlock was a great initiative as the advocacy on Access to Information legislation continues.

The selected institutions which were assessed included Malawi Electoral Commission, Office of the Ombudsman, Malawi Revenue Authority, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC).

Only ODPP and MRA responded to written requests for information while MBC, Ministry of Health and Office of Ombudsman had either inactive websites or none.