

**SPEECH BY ODPP DIRECTOR MR BRIGHT S.M. MANGULAMA AT THE EDITORS AND BUSINESS REPORTERS WORKSHOP ON PUBLIC PROCUREMENT REPORTING**

**Friday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008  
Club Makokola**

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- The Deputy Director of the ODPP, Mr Isaac Chilima
- Workshop facilitators
- Editors and business reporters representing different media houses
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Today is yet another milestone in the regulatory functions of the ODPP. Duty has again permitted us to meet and interface with you distinguished members of the press as we continue to join hands to promote responsible public procurement in Malawi. On behalf of the Office of Public Procurement and indeed on my own behalf, I wish to welcome you all to this important function.

Since the ODPP became operational in 2004, the media has relentlessly shown keen interest in the affairs of the ODPP as a regulatory authority. As an office, we can not take this kind gesture for granted. We know that without your involvement all our programmes aimed at promotion of transparent and accountable procurement would be futile.

Distinguished participants,

Following your interest in procurement issues and taking into account the fact that the ODPP is relatively new, my office tried as much as possible to devise ways and means through which we can coherently partner and interact with the media in order to ensure that our mandate, systems and procedures are clearly understood by the general public.

As the ODPP, we have undertaken a number of initiatives to fulfil our relationship obligation with the media. Some of you will recall that, just after this office became operational in 2004, a workshop was organised to introduce ourselves and our operational mandate.

Being the first workshop of its kind, we noted that the workshop had just scratched the surface. Participants had so many unanswered questions which they expected the ODPP to resolve. These emanated from their vivid recollection of the public sector's past poor procurement performance, which squandered millions of tax payers' hard earned contribution into public coffers. Provision of relevant information, therefore, required the ODPP to organise further media fora.

In recognition of the dynamism of the media and the need for frequent interaction, my office organised yet another training workshop on public procurement reporting. This was held in October and November 2006 in Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu. At least 100 journalists attended these workshops.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was during these training workshops that the idea to organise a procurement reporting workshop that would include editors was hatched. Participants observed that much as they were eager to report on procurement, the onus to determine what goes on air and in the papers rests with the editors.

As such, unless the editors valued and appreciated procurement issues, their contribution as reporters would remain remote. My office agreed with this observation having noted that procurement issues are technical in nature and complex. We, therefore, thought we needed to do something to ensure that both editors and reporters had a common understanding on the intricacies of public procurement. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the essence of our gathering here this morning.

In our view, a meeting of this sort has the capacity to positively leverage public procurement reporting in the country since the key determinants of news coverage are all present.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As an office, we noted that often, reporters are anxious to report on procurement when misprocurements that purportedly involve the so called big fish occur. At times, in an attempt to break news on such occurrences, some issues are misrepresented for lack of proper understanding regarding the technicalities, procedures and systems involved in procurement.

While my office applauds media attempts to cover procurement issues, we remain baffled when issues are not presented the way they ought to. I am not saying that all the time we would love positive stories about our office or procurement activities. Negative coverage, to some extent, helps us to assess our output, correct things and reposition ourselves in tandem with our mandate. I know in other instances, misrepresentations have arisen for lack of adequate information from the public institutions involved. I do not, however, want to speculate why such is the case.

But as the ODPP, we realise that it is our responsibility to make sure that everybody understands public procurement issues. From the controlling officer, the practising procurement officer, the media practitioner, the supplier, to the common man. We are obliged to make procurement issues well understood. This is why we decided to take a step further in our training initiatives to bring together you distinguished editors and reporters. It is my hope that you will find this time worth your commitment. It is again my hope that from this forum we will strategise on how we should proceed from here to ensure sustainable flow of procurement information amongst the various stakeholders in this sector which is increasingly becoming important. Your meaningful contribution can propel us into a strong relationship that can benefit the efficiency of my office and procuring entities through the development of inclusive work plans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to say that the current public procurement metamorphosis world over has transformed the field into an area that the media can not afford to overlook. It is an area that should arouse your interest for holistic coverage, study and research.

World over, procurement is big business and big news, be it positive or negative. This is the area where, in the Malawi context, if we look at our national budget, over 70 percent of the ORT is spent. In view of this huge magnitude, procurement has the capacity to accelerate national development if handled responsibly or frustrate development if left unregulated and at the mercy of a selfish lot of both big and small fish.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are probably aware, globally, the government is the largest buyer. This, therefore, augments corruption stakes in procurement, making it too conspicuous for the investigative eye of the media. Being such a big newsworthy area, the media can easily get carried away with material befitting the front page and screaming headlines. This satisfaction of the big catch in breaking such news overshadows the educative role the media can play of serving as teachers of responsible procurement amongst those that do not understand its intricacies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at this juncture to welcome our distinguished facilitators drawn from both the ODPP and beyond. I am particularly indebted to our external facilitators namely Mrs Mary Phombeya, Messrs Edward Chitsulo, Titus Mtegha, Anthony Kasunda and Joe Ching'ani for accepting our invitation to take part in this workshop. I know it is a sacrifice on your part to forego your busy schedules just to accommodate us. We can not take your assistance to the ODPP for granted.

Let me also thank you distinguished members of the press for availing yourselves to this workshop. Without your presence, it could not have been possible for this meeting to take place. We know some of you had to request your supervisors for an extension to submit your assignments in order to make room for your participation at this event. I hope you will not find your stories stale the time you return to your respective media houses.

I am also indebted for the management of your respective institutions for placing utmost value to this workshop and allowing your institutions to be represented. Kindly take a word of appreciation from my office to the authorities in your respective institutions.

May I also take this opportunity to thank the UNDP for financing this activity among other communication initiatives at the ODPP. My office has since its establishment enjoyed the invaluable support of the UNDP which has significantly consolidated our regulatory position.

Lastly, let me commend management of this hotel for their warm welcome and superb services which I hope each one of us is enjoying.

It is my sincere hope that our meeting here today will leave an indelible mark that will constantly remind you to make a little contribution of your journalistic abilities in making prudent public procurement work for Malawi.

Thank you for your attention.