



Fire destroys Luntha TV Broadcasting Equipment

LILONGWE, Malawi - On 14th January this year, fire gutted down Luntha Television broadcasting equipment at Malawi Telecommunications Limited (MTL) office in Lilongwe. The fire also destroyed the broadcasting equipment of many broadcasting stations in Malawi.

The MTL office, Area 3 Microwave, houses the control system (Headend) for Malawi Digital Broadcasting Network Limited (MDBNL), a public company responsible for signal distribution services to all broadcasters in the country. Many television stations including Luntha TV are still off air, a situation that will continue for several days to come as Chief Engineer of MDBNL, Dennis Chirwa said this morning.

I was in our studio in Lilongwe when we realised that Luntha TV is off air. I called Mr. Dennis, the Chief Engineer of Malawi Digital Broadcasting Network to find out the reasons of being off air for all television stations broadcasting on local channel. We later got information that the Headend (control system centre) at Malawi Telecommunication Limited centre is on fire.

I arrived at the scene with two reporters. I saw two fire trucks, a group of police officers and the destroyed building and equipment. We learnt that the firemen who arrived on time did not know how to operate. The second fire truck arrived when most of the properties were destroyed. Luntha TV burnt broadcasting equipment is worth quite a big sum of money and some of these have to be imported and quotations are being sought. Meanwhile, we look up to kind hearts for donations.

Lilongwe fire officer, Gideon Mwanza, said that the cause of the fire is unknown as they are still investigating. Many Malawians on social media and other online platforms are speculating that it is a political move as the country awaits for a Supreme court ruling on Presidential Election challenged by the Opposition party leaders which is expected this January.

As Malawi Communication Regulator Authority (MACRA) and Malawi Digital Broadcasting Network Ltd (MDBNL) are working on restoring their broadcasting equipment, Luntha TV is faced with financial challenges to restore its broadcasting equipment so that it can be back on air. Some of the damaged equipment include: decoder, ethernet switch, HDMI to SDI converter, POE power supply, ethernet cables and radio wave link just to mention a few. Our technical team and financial accountant are set to establish the total value of the damaged equipment.

Luntha TV is the only Catholic television station in Malawi. It is a non-profit broadcasting station under the authority and competence of the Montfort Missionaries in collaboration with the Daughters of Wisdom. It was founded as part and parcel of the Church's mandate to evangelize people in an integral manner (refer to 1965 Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium, Inter Mirifica* (Modern Means of Social Communication); Special Synod for Africa 1995). It broadcasts 24 hours and seven days reaching out all regions and districts of the country. Currently, it has two studios in Balaka and Lilongwe.

*Fr. Jairos Mpina, SMM
Luntha TV Director of Operations*