

THE CHAIRMAN
THE POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS' UNION
PRIVATE BAG 303
CHICHIRI
BLANTYRE 3

31ST MAY 1996

HIS EXCELLENCY DR BAKILI MULUZI
CHANCELLOR OF UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
SANJIKA PALACE

Your Excellency

On behalf of Polytechnic Students' Union and indeed on my own behalf, I write to bring to Your Excellency's attention what the students' body has agreed following the incidents of Monday, the 27th of May, 1996 at the first roadblock to Sanjika Palace.

Allow me Your Excellency, to begin with a brief background to the events of the said date. The Polytechnic students in conjunction with Chancellor College students had agreed to march and present a petition to you Sir as Chancellor of the University of Malawi. To that effect, I wrote a letter to the Inspector General of Police notifying him of the march and requesting Police escort. I faxed it in the morning of Friday, the 24th of May, 1996 and a copy of the same delivered to the Regional Commissioner of Police (South).

The Inspector General of Police did not reply to me but he had instructed the Regional Commissioner to notify the students through the Principal of Polytechnic that the students request of Police escort in marching to Sanjika had not been accepted. The Regional Commissioner submitted two reasons viz that your Excellency will be away on a tour hence you would not be available to receive our petition and that NO Police staff would be available to cover the march as ALL of them would be covering your tour.

In a letter from the Principal of Polytechnic addressed to me, which contained the Inspector General's reply, there was a paragraph, Your Excellency, allow me to quote "However they (Police) are not stopping you from marching only that, if anything goes wrong you will be sorely responsible."

I passed on this information to the students on Monday, the 27th of May, 1996 at around 8.00 am. The students insisted on marching without Police escort and indeed accepted to shoulder responsibility themselves should anything goes wrong. They assured me that they would be disciplined on the way.

True to their assurance Your Excellency, the students of Polytechnic (Chancellor College students had not arrived) marched peacefully from the Polytechnic in the Masauko-Chipembere Highway through Blantyre town on to Sanjika Palace without damaging or insulting anybody. We were well organised and neither street vendors nor anybody joined our group in order to breach peace.

Chancellor Your Excellency, started when we met armed Policemen at the first roadblock to Your Excellency's Palace. We were amazed to meet such Police force who according to the reply from the Inspector General were supposed to have left to cover Your Excellency's tour because your helicopters flew over us barely ten minutes after our arrival at the scene. Our negotiations with Regional Commissioner of Police yielded nothing until Mr Stambuli was called to the scene. We refused to give our petition to Mr Stambuli, whom us as University students can not recognize as our Chancellor's delegate, because as far as we are concerned Mr Stambuli is a Politician and Your Excellency's Economic Advisor and our petition has nothing to do with politics.

We agreed with Mr Stambuli that we proceed to the next gate to the Palace and wait till Your Excellency returns or till the Press Officer, Mr Osman arrives. Few minutes later, the Police started tear-gassing us and hell broke loose. Everyone ran for their lives while the Police who had refused us our right to be protected continued tear-gassing and chasing the students away. Eight of the students were arrested and kept in Police custody at Chilomoni Police Station. They were later in the day released on Police bail and are expected to appear before Blantyre Magistrate Court, on Friday, the 31st of May, 1996 to answer to charges of conduct likely to breach peace. Some students sustained minor injuries and lost their property like money, shoes, jerseys, etc.

We the students of The Polytechnic submit that the behaviour of the Police was unethical, unprofessional, disgracing and unacceptable in any civilized and democratic society. We further submit that we were highly oppressed and unfairly treated. We fail to understand why the Police should think our conduct will likely breach peace when we had (without their escort) marched peacefully through Blantyre City which is more vulnerable to damage than the lone and isolated Palace. We feel our constitutional right granted to us as citizens of Malawi under S38 of the constitution of Republic of Malawi to gather and demonstrate peacefully was infringed upon.

Following all this, the students body has agreed that Your Excellency set a date due to the urgency of the matter within next working week beginning 2nd June to 9th June, 1996 when Your Excellency would receive our petition in the presence of all students and not just a few delegates.

If our demands are not met within the specified time and therefore frustrated, we may require you to relinquish your post as Chancellor as it seems you are too busy to attend to your duties as Chancellor.

Should you not reply the students will not participate in the Chancellor's Trophy to be held from the 8th to the 9th of June, 1996.

Lastly we wish Your Excellency personal good health and wisdom to administer this country.

Yours faithfully

D. Chatima

DUMISANI CHATIMA
(P.S.U. CHAIRMAN)

cc: Vice Chancellor
All Principals
All Students' Union
Ombudsman