



NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR CIVIC EDUCATION Public Trust

PRESS STATEMENT - SAFE KEEPING OF VOTER CERTIFICATES

The National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) Public Trust wishes to add its voice to the concerns that are being raised in different parts of the country with regard to some worrying acts revolving around the taking of details or even attempts to take complete custody of voter registration certificates that do not belong to them by some misguided party zealots.

NICE would like to join the Malawi Electoral Commission in further reminding all registered voters of their responsibility to take care of their voter certificates for them to vote easily on May 20, 2014. In the same vein, NICE wishes to condemn any acts that are aimed at confusing registered voters through seeking to take details of their voter certificates or even withdraw them completely for whatever reason against their will.

We wish to remind Malawians that the voter certificate is a personal document that should be guarded jealously against any kind of intrusion. Hence, all party supporters who are given this unfortunate responsibility of taking the details or withdrawing other people's voter certificates need to bear in mind that this act is not just unethical but also offensive and should be condemned in the strongest terms. NICE wishes to draw the attention of all Malawians to the fact that this document enjoys legal protection in accordance with the *Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act* of 1998 and all those concerned need to take note of the seriousness of their actions. Section 24 of the *Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act* states in sub-sections 3) to 5) that:

3) A person to whom a voter's registration certificate has been issued shall be personally responsible at all times for its safekeeping and shall not place or cause it to be placed in the custody of any other person or allow any other person to use it to vote in an election.

4) No person shall receive, keep or use, in relation to an election, a voter's registration certificate that has not been issued to him in accordance with this section.

5) Any person who contravenes subsection (3) or (4), or who aids, abets or counsels, or conspires with, any person to contravene subsection (3) or (4), shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to a fine of K50,000.00 and to imprisonment for seven years.

We wish to join MEC (following its press release dated 24th September, 2013) in appealing to all registered voters not to allow anyone for whatever purpose, to withdraw the voter certificates from them with or against their wish. They should also not offer their certificates for sale or exchange with anything as this constitutes a crime under the electoral law as stipulated above. Members of the general public are also informed that it is an offence to be found in possession of registration certificates that do not belong to them. They are further encouraged to report to Police any person or group that is buying or coercing people to surrender their registration certificates.

NICE feels duty-bound to remind members of the general public that the right to vote cannot be bought at any price under the sun. Free, fair, accessible and transparent elections remain a crucial tenet of any meaningful democracy globally. All registered voters should treasure the voter certificate in the same manner they do their academic certificates by avoiding the following:

- Carrying them around with them all the time to reduce the risk of losing, getting them stolen or soaked as the rainy season progresses;
- Keeping them out of the reach of children to reduce chances of being torn or misplaced;
- Keeping the voter certificate in books as the certificate could be forgotten and unknowingly handed over to someone else;
- Avoiding possibilities of the certificate coming into contact with fire as it can be burnt;
- Avoid keeping the certificate next to the body as it can be soaked by sweat and get disfigured in the process.

NICE, finally, wishes to remind all politicians and aspiring candidates to get involved in issue-based campaigns instead of relying on the “psychology of voter certificates” as it will only lead them into conflict with the law.

Remember, it is the voter certificate which will help to identify any voter on the polling day and make the exercise go on smoothly.