

## MPs endorse spy machine

Written by Kingsley Jassi  
Friday, 15 February 2013 08:16

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The Media and Communications committee of Parliament has recommended the implementation of the Consolidated ICT Regulatory Management System (Cirms) machine, otherwise called spy machine, saying it will monitor financial performance and service provision by telecommunication companies in the country.



Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (Macra) bought the machine at around K500 million, but it was strongly challenged by telecommunication operators.

"The major findings of the committee are that the installation of the machine would be beneficial to Malawians. All members of the committee who were present for the meeting and having formed a quorum unanimously adopted this report," said the committee's Deputy Chairperson Ellen Chisale in the House on Thursday..

The report was not debated in the House, but the MPs are scheduled to discuss it on Tuesday next week for adoption.

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The committee said it had a seven-month consultation process which involved workshops about its operations, adding the media was also involved in some consultative workshops.

The Committee requested for the speedy review of the Communications Act of 1998 in order to incorporate current trends in the telecommunications sector and to include issues of internet, cyber crime and some roles of Macra which need to be enhanced.

"The Committee wishes that the revised Communications Act should not provide loopholes where operators insist on how they wish to be regulated," said the deputy chairperson.

According to Macra, when installed the machine would help better monitor financial performances by telecommunication companies hence improve collection of revenue by the government agency.

It is also said Macra would be able to monitor general performance of service provision by the companies as issues of call dropouts and length of calls would be easily monitored.

There was no immediate reaction from the telecommunication companies that include Airtel, TNM, Malawi Telecommunication Limited and Access who now have an association intended to lobby and defend the sector on policy issues.

Concerned citizens Eric Sabwera and Hophmally Makande, who is now ruling People's Party (PP) spokesperson dragged Macra to court where they challenged use of Cirms to monitor and analyse all telecommunication traffic.

High Court Judge Healey Potani ruled in their favour and prohibited Macra from going ahead with the installation of the machine, saying it has no mandate, powers or jurisdiction to implement it.

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However, Macra has appealed to the Supreme Court of Appeal, challenging the High Court's decision.

Macra Director General Charles Nsaliwa has argued on several occasions that Cirms is purely aimed at "quality control of services" offered by the country's telecommunication service providers.