

By George Chellah
 TRANSPARENCY International Zambia (TIZ) president Reuben Lifuka has said the violence exhibited by MMD cadres has the full endorsement of the senior leadership of the ruling party.

And Zambia Civic Education Association (ZCEA) executive director Judith Mulenga said Lieutenant General Ronnie Shikapwasha's sentiments on violence against *Post* journalists fly in the face of Christianity and in the face of Article 15 of the Constitution.

Lifuka condemned information minister Lt Gen Shikapwasha's justification of MMD cadres' violence against *Post* journalists.

Lifuka accuses MMD leadership of supporting cadres' violence

"The careless statement made confirms that the violence exhibited by MMD cadres has the full endorsement of the senior leadership of the ruling party. We wish to remind Hon Shikapwasha and the ruling party that violence begets violence and all Zambians should work towards civilised ways of resolving differences as opposed to supporting hooliganism all in the name of settling

political scores," Lifuka said. "It is a known fact that violence, if given room to flourish will demean our democracy and we will as a country drift into a state of anarchy. It is incumbent that leaders like Hon Shikapwasha are not consumed by personal hatred of certain private media - but should reflect on the wider implications of the violent acts being perpetrated by the MMD cadres."

He said Zambia continued to be a living witness of what happens when licensed violence of this kind - innocuous as it may seem - spirals into a fully-fledged civil conflict.

"The country has provided shelter to numerous refugees running from wars and conflict and Lt Gen Shikapwasha as a former Air Force commander is well-placed to know how ordinary women and children in particular suffer the consequences of such conflicts," Lifuka said.

Lifuka said the media had an important role in shaping the country's democracy.

"And Zambia has sufficient laws to deal with libel and slander and we would like to encourage all those who feel offended by the work of any newspaper or media house, to seek redress in the courts of law as opposed to taking the law into their own hands," Lifuka said. "The MMD cadres and the party should be vividly aware that they do not have the monopoly of violence and other political parties may respond in similar fashion and the Zambian people will have no one to blame for this hooliganism but the ruling party. The MMD cannot be forgiven for violent acts - because they are the party in power - and the behaviour of its members should be above reproach."

He urged all political players to realise that the Zambian people deserved solutions to the numerous socio-economic problems that they face.

"And they are tired of being used as pawns in the struggle for power among the political players.

Politics in Zambia has long stopped being about service to the people - rather it is a consummation of individual life goals of a few people. It is a pity that most of our political parties continue to fail to utilise politics as mould for using the power of persuasion in order to win people over, instead, we see parties electing to use force in order to deal with dissenting views," Lifuka said. "Politics should not be an avenue to maim or injure opponents - it should be a platform for competition of ideas and opinions. We want to warn all political parties that if they do not deal with elements of hooliganism in their rank and file - then they are concocting a dangerous recipe for violence in the next presidential and general elections."

And Mulenga said Jesus never used violence on people and that the Constitution in article 15 forbids violence even by the state as interpreted by the High Court in the Banda versus the People of 1999 which led to the prohibition of violence even against criminals in the country.

"When He [Jesus] became angry at the money changers in the temple, he turned over their tables, and he cracked a whip at the 'sheep and oxen alike.' [John 2:15] not the people. Even in this most dramatic account of Jesus' anger, he does not turn the whip on the offenders," Mulenga said. "And on another occasion when his disciple Simon Peter attempted to use violence as an act of love on God's behalf [in the garden of Gethsemane] - to 'save' Him - Jesus called Peter 'Satan.' Christ could not have given a more

definitive response to violence - he does not permit it under any circumstance!

"The condoning of violence does not come from a religious conviction but it is a result of the way the proponents of violence were socialised - raised as children. They were beaten into submission in the guise of disciplining them when they were children and this sent an indelible signal to them that when you are bigger and stronger and in numbers you can beat those against you into submission in the guise of discipline. Violence does not form any part of discipline."

Mulenga explained that discipline was about teaching.

She said it was frightening to read Lt Gen Shikapwasha's comments on violence especially that he was the country's information minister.

"The philosophy of discipline assumes that the offender is ignorant of the appropriate way to behave in a situation. Therefore, discipline's main objective is to teach the offender what to do instead of merely stopping the offence. It was chilling to read the Honourable Minister's Comments especially as Minister of Information," said Mulenga. "His words negates the work we are trying to do to promote non-violent positive parenting and ending corporal punishment of children in order to safeguard a non-violent future Zambian society. In Zambia violence against children is pandemic all in the guise of disciplining them and the Minister's words do not promote child protection."