



**NATIONAL ADDRESS BY MEC CHAIRPERSON, JUSTICE ANNABEL
MTALIMANJA**

**ON THE LAUNCH OF 17th MARCH 2026 PARLIAMENTARY BY-
ELECTIONS IN NKHOTAKOTA, LILONGWE CITY, DEDZA, BLANTYRE
CITY, AND RUMPHI;**

AND,

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT BY-ELECTIONS IN KARONGA, MZUZU CITY,
DOWA, LILONGWE, MCHINJI, MANGOCHI, ZOMBA AND THYOLO**

15TH JANUARY 2026

Greetings and warm wishes for the New Year, 2026 to you all from the Malawi Electoral Commission.

Today, the Commission is pleased to announce that it has planned to conduct by-elections on 17th March 2026 to fill vacancies in five (5) Constituencies and nine (9) Wards.

For Parliamentary, the by-elections will take place in the following constituencies:

1. Nkhotakota Liwaladzi;
2. Lilongwe City Bwaila;
3. Dedza Mtakataka;
4. Blantyre West ; and
5. Rumphi Central.

Local Government, the by-elections will be held in:

1. Igthembe Ward, in Karonga Songwe constituency;
2. Luwinga Ward, in Mzuzu City North constituency;
3. Linthembwe Ward, in Dowa Ngala constituency;
4. Chilobwe Ward, in Lilongwe Chilobwe constituency;
5. Msitu Ward, in Mchinji South constituency;
6. Mikongo Ward, in Mangochi North East constituency;
7. Chanda Ward in Zomba Chikomwe constituency;
8. Chirunga Ward in Zomba City North constituency; and
9. Muonekera Ward in Thyolo Goliatu constituency.

The constituencies and wards became vacant for various reasons that include:

- i. Postponement of electoral processes by the Commission;
- ii. Death of duly nominated candidates, sponsored by political parties;
- iii. Nullification of the elections by the Commission;
- iv. Court orders and judgments either nullifying elections or decisions by the Commission; and
- v. A winning candidate assuming another public office.

The by-elections are being held to comply with section 63(2)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi which provides that:

"any by-election to fill the vacancy shall be held in the next quarter of the calendar year after the seat of the member becomes vacant, or if the circumstances do not so permit, then as expeditiously as possible, but a by-election shall not be held where a vacancy occurs within twelve months before the holding of a General Election."

At this juncture, allow me to present highlights of the calendar of activities between now and polling day on 17th March 2026.

1. Registration of Voters

For any election that should be held, the Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Act mandates the Commission to conduct voter registration, for a period of not less than seven (7) days and not more than fourteen (14) days.

For these by-elections, the Commission resolved to open voter registration centres for seven (7) days from 31st January to 6th

February 2026. Registration Centres will open at 8:00AM and close at 4:00PM throughout the period, including on Saturday and Sunday without observing a lunch break.

On the last date of voter registration, 6th February 2026, the Elections Management System will close the Election Management Device (EMDs) for voter registration at 4:00pm. Eligible voters are therefore urged to present themselves at voter registration centres to process their registration earlier than 4:00pm.

The Commission will register eligible voters aged 18 and above, or those who will attain the voting age by 17th March 2026. I must emphasise that those registering must be eligible voters who did not register for the 2025 General Election.

Those who registered for the 2025 General Election, regardless of whether they voted or not, need NOT register again. Remember, registering more than once as a voter is a crime and whoever is known to have done so will be prosecuted.

2. No Transfer of voters

All stakeholders are advised that there will be no transfer of voters in these by-elections. Those who registered in other areas but have now moved into the by-election areas are not eligible to transfer or register afresh for the by-elections. As such they will not be permitted to vote.

3. Inspection of the Voters' Register

For these by-elections, the Commission has provided two (2) days, on 17th February and 18th February 2026 when all registered voters, including those that registered for the 2025 General Election, will verify their names in the voters' register at the centre where they registered. This is a very important exercise and the Commission is encouraging all registered voters in the by-election areas to participate.

For this exercise, the centres will open from 8:00AM to 4:00PM without observing lunch break.

Registered voters will also be able to verify their details by dialling *2509# on TNM and Airtel networks for free. All registered voters are encouraged to use this facility ahead of the set dates so that if they experience challenges with their entry in the voters' register they should present themselves at the centre where they registered to be assisted within the period allocated.

All registered voters who lost their voters certificates are also encouraged to go to the centre where they registered and get a replacement that they will use on polling day during this period.

4. Proof of Eligibility to Register as a Voter

Persons eligible to register as voters, will in conformity with section 12 of the Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government

Elections Act, be required to present proof of registration with the National Registration Bureau (NRB). The acceptable documents as proof of national registration is any of the following:

- a. A valid national ID;
- b. An expired national ID. Stakeholders should note that expired IDs will be accepted because government extended the suspension of expiry dates of national identity cards to January 2027;
- c. An NRB system generated printed slip, bearing the individual's name and unique national ID number.

The Commission advises that it is the responsibility of every eligible voter to ensure they have the requisite proof of eligibility when they present themselves for registration at a registration centre.

For these by-elections there will be no staff from the NRB at the registration centres to register those that do not have the national ID or render help those that have lost or have challenges with their proof of registration with the NRB. Such people should visit the NRB offices nearest to them in advance before the voter registration period to be assisted.

5. Monitoring by Representatives of Candidates and Political Parties

The Commission is informing all political parties and aspiring candidates, that they can place up to two (2) representatives at each registration centre to monitor voter registration and

inspection of the voters' register exercises. The deadline for submission of the names of representatives to the respective MEC District Election Offices is 29th January 2026.

For polling, political parties and independent candidates also have the right to place up to two (2) representatives per polling station and Constituency Tally Centre to monitor polling and vote counting processes. The deadline for submitting the names is 10th March 2026.

Political parties and independent candidates are reminded that it is their responsibility to meet transport, subsistence, and upkeep costs for their representatives that they will deploy.

6. Observation of Electoral Activities by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

All CSOs and individuals who wish to observe the by-election activities stationed at any registration centre will be required to apply for accreditation through the respective MEC District Office. The deadline for applying to observe the Voter Registration and verification is 29th January 2026, while for Polling is 10th March 2026.

For all roving observers they should submit their details including a duly filled application form and passport photos to the MEC Chief Election Officer through email ceo@mec.org.mw by 29th January 2026.

7. Eligibility to Contest

According to section 38 of the Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Act, a person shall not be qualified to be nominated for election as a member of the National Assembly or councillor unless that person—

- a. is a citizen of Malawi;
- b. has, at the time of nomination, attained the age of twenty-one
- c. is able to speak and to read the English language well enough to take an active part in the proceedings of the National Assembly or council; and
- d. is a registered voter in any constituency or ward, as a case may be.

Electoral stakeholders should note that academic or educational qualifications like holding a Malawi School Certificate (MSCE) or a first degree are not part of the eligibility criteria for election to any of the two positions.

8. Nomination of Candidates

As already pointed out, the vacancies have arisen for various reasons. Accordingly, there are variations in the nomination processes and these respond to the specific circumstances of each by-election of which stakeholders are advised to take particular note as follows:

1. In all the by-election areas, new candidates are welcome to contest. This is regardless of whether they contested in another constituency or ward on 16 September 2025.

2. Those who were duly nominated to contest in the 16 September 2025 polls in the by-election areas, except in Rumphi Central Constituency and Muonekera Ward in Thyolo Goliati constituency, will not be required to submit new nomination papers. Instead, they will be required to collect, sign, and submit a letter of intent to contest to the Commission through their respective Constituency Returning Officers by 4.00 PM on 20th February 2026, declaring their interest to contest. Should the Commission not hear from the concerned candidates by the closing date, it shall be deemed that they are not interested to contest in these by-elections.
3. In Rumphi Central Constituency and Muonekera Ward in Thyolo Goliati constituency, all candidates will be required to pay nomination fees before collection of nomination papers, regardless of whether they contested last year or not. They just need to pay nomination fees at the bank and collect nomination papers at their respective council offices.
4. In addition to the above, candidates who were duly nominated to contest in the 16th September 2025 General Election will not be allowed to switch allegiance. Similarly, political parties that already sponsored a candidate to participate in the 16 September 2025 General Election will not be allowed to change candidates.

5. All candidates who were duly nominated but withdrew from the race will be required to pay nomination fees and collect nomination papers again if they intend to contest.
6. Also, the candidates who were duly nominated, will not be allowed to transfer that nomination to contest in another by-election area.

The nomination fees for the Local Government By-elections are as follows:

1. K200,000 for male candidates; and,
2. K100,000 for female candidates as well as the youth and people with disabilities.

For Parliamentary Elections, the nomination fees are:

1. K2,500,000 for male candidates; and
2. K1,250,000 in respect of female candidates as well as the youth and people with disabilities.

To qualify for the Youth Category, a candidate should be less than 35 years of age on the day of presenting their nomination papers. For these by-elections, only those born on or after 21 February 1991 will be eligible to qualify for the youth category fee.

Please note that, it is the responsibility of a candidate to pay appropriate nomination fees. Failure to do so may risk one's nomination papers being rejected.

To qualify for the preferential fees for People with Disabilities, a candidate wishing to be classified in the category will be required to present a copy of a certificate of disability issued by Malawi Council for Disability Affairs (MACODA). The certificate will be presented to the Constituency Returning Officer along with the rest of the nomination papers.

Candidates or their representatives are advised to deposit in the appropriate bank account their nomination fees at the nearest branch of FDH Bank PLC using pre-printed deposit slips. Upon depositing the nomination fees, the deposit slip should be presented to the Council Returning Officers through the District Elections Office based at respective Council Offices or facility, in order to collect the nomination papers and be issued with general receipt.

Kindly take note that nomination papers will be available for collection from 20th January 2026 from the respective MEC district office and this process will continue up to 21st February 2026.

Please take note that the nomination papers or fees cannot be swapped between candidates or political parties. The name of the candidate or party on the deposit slip should match with the one that would appear on the nomination papers.

9. Pre-examination and presentation of nomination papers

Candidates are encouraged to approach the Constituency Returning Officers at any time to examine their nomination papers and supporting documents before they are submitted. In addition, the Commission has designated 20th February 2026 as a specific day when aspiring candidates or their representatives will go to their respective Constituency Returning Officers with the nomination papers for pre-examination. Please take note that this process can only be done physically, and not through any other means of communication.

Presentation of nomination papers shall take place on 21st February 2026 between 8.00AM and 4:00PM. For the purpose of assuring orderliness in the process, candidates will be allocated respective presentation time slots by the Constituency Returning Officer.

10. Official Campaign Period

The official campaign period for the by elections commences today, Thursday, 15 January 2026. In accordance with the law, the official campaign period shall be 60 days. Therefore, the campaign period will close on 15th March 2026 at 6.00am.

The campaign period is a separate activity from the nomination process as such aspiring candidates and their followers are free to start campaigning even before presentation of nomination papers.

Stakeholders and aspiring candidates are advised that engaging in campaign-related activities after this period constitutes a criminal offence, and any individual who campaigns outside the designated campaign period will face prosecution.

The Commission is urging political parties, all candidates, and their followers to focus on undertaking an issue-based campaign. They should refrain from using inflammatory language because in addition to breaking the law, it has the potential to infringe on other peoples' right to campaign freely and could also stir political violence.

Candidates and their followers should also note that the law has prohibited and criminalised use of public resources for campaign purposes. This includes receiving any contribution or donation, in cash or in kind, from the State, any organ of the State or agency of the State or any state-owned enterprise.

For this purpose, "Public resource" means any property owned by the Government, an organ of the Government, a statutory corporation or body or state-owned enterprise.

Further, all electoral stakeholders are reminded that the law has also banned giving of handouts. Should anyone witness such an act, they are advised to report to the Office of the registrar of Political Parties within seven days of such occurrence by dialling free on 4361 or sending an email to complaints@rpp.mw.

11. Pre-checking of Polling Materials

The Commission has designated 16th March 2026 between 9.00 AM and 12:00 noon for pre-checking of polling materials in all polling stations in the by-election areas. The Presiding Officers will open and check all the election materials, including the packaging for ballot papers, results sheets and other election materials to ensure that they have received correct ones and in the right quantities.

Representatives of independent candidates and contesting political parties are encouraged to be present for this exercise. However, I should state clearly that this exercise shall proceed even in instances where political party and independent candidates representatives fail or delay to report at the polling station.

After the pre-checking process of the electoral materials, presiding officers will brief independent candidate and political party representatives on the polling process.

12. Polling, Vote Counting and Announcement of Results

My fellow Malawians, polling will take place on 17th March 2026 from 6.00 AM up to 4.00 PM. As was the case during the 16 September 2025 General Election, the Commission will deploy and use Biometric Voter Verification Devices (BVVD) for identifying

voters at the polling station, along with the physical voter's register.

When going to vote, voters will be expected to take with them, their voter registration certificate for easy identification. If any voter lost their voter registration certificate or for any other reason they cannot find it, they should still go to the centre where they registered, and the polling staff will assist them to vote once they have been positively identified in the voters' register.

Vote counting will be done at the same polling station and will be immediately start at 4.00pm or immediately after the last voter casts their ballot. Independent candidate and party representatives will be expected to sign and get a copy of the results and another copy will be displayed at the polling station where voting took place. The presiding officer will then take the results to the Constituency Tally Centre where they will be aggregated and transferred physically and electronically to the Main Tally Centre.

The Commission is expected to announce the results by 20th March 2026 from the Main Tally Centre to be located in Lilongwe.

13. Accreditation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

The Commission wishes to inform all CSOs that were accredited to conduct voter education in readiness of the 16th September 2025 General Election that their accreditation is still valid for these by-

elections. Accordingly, there is no need to apply for accreditation to conduct voter education for these by-elections.

14. Voter Education activities by the Commission

Regarding voter education and mobilisation, the Commission will use the following approaches:

1. National and community radios;
2. Sending SMSs;
3. Production and distribution of IEC materials;
4. Sensitization meetings that will among others target traditional and religious leaders;
5. loudhailer for mass mobilisation;
6. Engagement and deployment of Constituency Civic and Voter Education Assistants (CCVEAs)

15. Launch of By-elections in Respective Constituencies and Wards

I wish to announce that the Commission has arranged stakeholders' meetings to launch the by-elections in the wards and constituencies as follows:-

On 16th January 2026

1. Dedza Mtakatika Constituency at Mankhamba TDC
2. Muonekera Ward at Goliatu TDC in Thyolo

On 17th January 2026

1. Ighembe Ward at Ighembe TDC in Karonga;

2. Lilongwe City Bwaila Constituency at Bwaila Secondary School Minor Hall;
3. Blantyre West Constituency at Chigumukire TDC in Blantyre;

On 18th January 2026

1. Rumphi Central Constituency at Bumba TDC, in Rumphi;
2. Chilobwe Ward at Kasiya F. P. School in Lilongwe;
3. Chirunga Ward at Chikamveka F. P. School, in Zomba City.

On 19th January 2026

1. Luwinga Ward, at Luwinga Secondary School Hall in Mzuzu City;
2. Msitu Ward, at Waliranji TDC in Mchinji;
3. Chanda Ward, at St. Martins TDC, in Zomba.

On 20th January 2026

1. Linthembwe Ward, at Chinkoka TDC in Dowa;
2. Nkhotakota Liwaladzi Constituency, at Walemera TDC in Nkhotakota;
3. Mikongo Ward, at Malukula F. P. School in Mangochi

16. Other Parliamentary Vacancies

The Commission also wishes to inform the public that it is closely following the election cases under litigation in Court involving Parliamentary election in Mzimba Hora constituency which is in the Supreme Court of Appeal and in Nsanje South constituency

where the period within which any further litigation may be conducted is yet to elapse.

17. Special Message on the by-elections

The Commission is advising the electorate to refrain from acts of violence, intimidation and interfering with electoral activities, including registration, inspection, polling and results counting.

The Commission wishes to emphasise that every election is equally important and serious business, and is, therefore, appealing to all those that are eligible to register and vote to participate accordingly.

The Commission is further appealing to all political parties, aspiring independent candidates and stakeholders to take advantage of the by-elections to provide an opportunity for more women, persons with disabilities and the youth to participate in elections as candidates.

The Commission is assuring all stakeholders that it is committed to implementing all the by-election processes in accordance with the laws governing the conduct of elections to ensure free, fair, and credible by-election.

MAY GOD, THE ALMIGHTY BLESS YOU.

MAY HE BLESS OUR NATION.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.