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THE Media Legal Reform Committee (MLRC) has said it will not relent in its battle to have the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill enacted.

Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)-Zambia Chapter chairperson Kellys Kaunda told journalists yesterday that government should not feel threatened by the Freedom of Information (FOI) bill because it was intended to serve everyone.

"What we can only appeal to this government is that this law is not intended to bring down your power, to bring down your government, so don't be afraid of it," he said.

"If they turn us down today, we are not going to relent, we shall still continue to fight."

Kaunda said even those in government would need access to information even when out of government.

"The best law is the one that serves you when you are in government and when you are out. If government turns down something that we believe is in the interest of the public, we are not going to relent. Governments come and go, but people will always be there and they are our greatest asset," he said.

He said if government turned down the FOI bill, they would turn down all the people who believed in it.

"If it fails in this administration, we'll still try in the next administration, because governments come and go," he said.

"So if it means we media practitioners remaining alone to sustain this battle, so shall it be. Because we believe in it."

And delivering a joint statement by MLRC, Press Association of Zambia vice-president Amos Chanda also expressed concern that taking away the FOI bill at committee stage and keeping it from Parliament for a long time was abuse of the parliamentary process and procedure.

"We are suspicious that there is no good faith in the manner government is purportedly undertaking consultations on the FOI bill and we ask for the process to be made public," he said.

Chanda said the fallout of not having the FOI bill was already showing in decisions such as the holding of proceedings of the tribunal investigating the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) in camera.

"Closing out the media and other interest groups from proceedings of a matter of grave public interest like this one is a blatant infringement of the public's fundamental right to information," he said.

Chanda also expressed disappointment at information minister Mutale Nalumango's alleged deliberate delay in having those recommended to the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) ratified by Parliament.

"The minister has chosen to delay taking the names to Parliament for ratification, thereby raising suspicion that government wants to manipulate the appointment process," he said.

Chanda said it was dismaying that the law reform process appeared to have stopped at the enactment of the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation Amendment Act and Independent Broadcastings Act.

"It's now been 14 months since these laws were passed but nothing tangible has been done," he said.

He questioned government's allocation in this year's budget to the IBA, which had not yet been established.

"In the meantime, ZNBC has already started levying the public licence fees without the existence of a board. A situation we regard as a grave anomaly which needs to be immediately corrected with the appointment of a new ZNBC board," he said.

The Media Legal Reform Committee comprises various media organizations including the Press Association of Zambia (PAZA), Zambia Union of Journalist (ZUJ), Zambia Media Women (ZAMWA) and Society For Senior Zambian Journalists (SSZJ).