

Anglican bishops defy court order

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BRIGHT SONANI
NEWS ANALYST

Anglican bishops of the Central African Province on Wednesday defied a High Court injunction some church members earlier obtained and went ahead to confirm Francis Kaulanda as new bishop of the Lake Malawi Diocese.

The bishops also threatened to commence criminal proceedings against leaders of the group objecting to Kaulanda's confirmation, arguing some of the people whose names appear on the letter of objection did not give their consent.

Lawyer representing those challenging Kaulanda's appointment, Andy Kaonga, declined to



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDY GUMULIRA

Mchombo: The court has no jurisdiction

comment on the matter.

But one member of the group, Charles Wemba, said the confirmation means the bishops are in contempt of court.

"I think they know what they are doing," said Wemba.

Before the confirmation, four bishops led by Dean of the Province Albert

Chama, observed that the High Court in Malawi has no authority to stop the process as it is a church affair.

Reads the bishops' statement, in part: "The Court of Confirmation commented that, strictly speaking, the civil court has no jurisdiction over an ecumenical and ecclesiastical matter.

"The ... election or prevention of the election of an Anglican bishop is not within the domain of the civil court. The election, wherever it takes place, is the elevation of a priest to the worldwide communion of bishops and is not the concern of only one diocese."

The bishops argued Wemba and his colleagues were given an opportunity to present their grievances but they opted

to serve the clerics with an injunction to stop the process.

Secretary of the Province William Mchombo, who signed the statement alongside Chama, in an interview said the ruling from the Court of Confirmation has also been sent to the High Court through church lawyers.

The panel of four bishops at the Court of Confirmation also comprised Provincial Registrar Bob Stumbles and James Tengatenga of Southern Malawi.

In their letter of objection, the members asked leaders of the province to investigate Kaulanda before confirming him, accusing him of being "dishonest, immoral and of unsound faith". ■