



## Ombudsman cracks whip on Ministry of Education

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The Office of the Ombudsman has ordered the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to pay rural allowance arrears to 23 Balaka-based teachers who were unfairly removed from eligible recipients' list in July 2013.

The teachers are from St Augustine Primary School who lodged a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman on September 8 2014.

The ministry introduced rural allowances, which is currently at K10, 000 a month, some years ago to compensate teachers for the hardships that they face when working in rural areas thus ensuring their retention in such areas.

But since the system started some years ago, it has been marred by dissatisfaction as some teachers feel their exclusion from the system cannot be justified.

The Ombudsman's determination means the ministry is expected to cough over K8 million to cater for all 23 teachers.

According to the determination which the Ombudsman Martha Chizuma-Mwangonde made on Tuesday June 14 2016, the ministry is supposed to pay the arrears within 30 days and re-instate the school to the list of those entitled to receive rural allowance within 21 days from the day of determination.

The Ombudsman has also ordered the secretary responsible for primary education to write a letter of apology to the teachers for the manner in which the ministry removed their school from the list of beneficiaries and also handled the complaints after they lodged their claim.

The evidence from both the complainants and the ministry show that the school had been on the list of beneficiaries but was removed without any justification in July 2013.

“This rural allowance is not a favour to these teachers in rural areas. It is an entitlement that they have by virtue of working in rural areas. And it is high time the respondent's officers recognise and treat teachers with some levels of decency that they deserve. These are the people in whose hands Malawi's future literally lies and it is totally unfair to treat them as beggars for the money they have worked for.

“My office keeps on receiving these kinds of complaints against respondents. And most of the time they are valid. The time these teachers spend pursuing these claims could have been used to teach our future President or Chief Justice. It is high time that the respondents get their act together on these issues if they really care about the future of this country,” the determination reads in part.

The copy of determination also shows that a certain Mr Nomoniwa of Balaka District Education Manager office at one time threatened to remove the school from the beneficiary list after one of the teachers' insisted to have her name back on the list of rural allowance recipients.

The Ombudsman has told any party that is not satisfied with her determination to apply for a review at the High Court within 90 days from the date of determination.