

# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FORUM

## PRESS STATEMENT:

### CONDEMNING ATTACKS ON PERSONS WITH ALBINISM: THE CASE OF MACDONALD MASAMBU

#### A Call for urgent, swift and decisive investigations by Government and the Police

We, the undersigned Human Rights Defenders—a network of a number of non-governmental organizations with an interest in the protection of human rights of all persons without discrimination—, under the Human Rights Defenders Forum (HRDF), are deeply concerned and disturbed by the unabated frequency and rate of attacks on persons with albinism in the country.

At a time when we expected the eradication of cases of abductions and killings of persons with albinism, the status quo tells a different story. At HRDF, we believe that persons living with albinism must enjoy similar rights like any other person in the country that include guarantees of their safety and security by the State. The continued attacks towards people with albinism are inhumane and a reflective of state failure to protect their rights, and we strongly condemn such.

The disappearance of a 22 year old man, Macdonald Masambuka, of Nakawa Village, Traditional Authority (T/A) Nook in Machinga district on 9 March 2018 is another chilling reminder of the failure by responsible authorities to curb the targeted attacks on persons living with Albinism. The case will no doubt increase the trauma anxieties and insecurities of persons with albinism.

The disappearance of Masambuka is not a case in isolation. From 2014 over 21 persons with albinism have been killed and over 9 cases of abductions have been reported. In the past four months alone three cases of abduction have been recorded. Despite efforts by both local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the international community to add a voice in condemning the acts, the cases of abductions and killings of persons continue to be recorded.

Commenting on this issue in April 2016, Ikponwosa Ero, the United Nations (UN) independent expert on the rights of persons with disabilities, observed that the atrocities on persons with albinism were rendering them an endangered group facing a risk of systemic extinction over time if nothing is done. Elsewhere, Amnesty International released an 80-paged report titled: We Are

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Not Animals To Be Hunted or Sold: Violence And Discrimination Against People With Albinism in Malawi which detailed how people with albinism are suffering in Malawi.

Despite the enactment of responsive new laws such as the Anatomy Act 2016 and amendments to the Penal Code, some key players in the criminal justice system choose to ignore albinism cases and it remains a hopeless situation for our fellow brothers and sisters. There are delays within the justice delivery system coupled with weak prosecutorial system that sees suspects of these inhumane practices easily getting released on bails despite being serious threat to the society. There is a low rate of conviction in these cases, which seems to spur impunity.

We, as Human Rights Defenders find this deplorable and highly worrisome. The failure by the police to successfully investigate related cases and break what seems be criminal human trafficking syndicate shakes our trust in this institution. As Human Rights Defenders, we think and trust there is more that can be done to curb these deadly acts.

Government's lack of decisiveness and consistency in responding to the attacks leaves us helplessly shocked. The task force set by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Malawi in 2015 lacks leadership and has failed to give Malawians concrete results. Again, government and relevant authorities seem to lack momentum in the fight. While our brothers and sisters with albinism continue to be targeted, killed and attacked, authorities choose to do business as usual, with little or no urgency in their protection and response.

Chapter IV of the Malawi Constitution plainly commits the State to the protection of human rights "of all the peoples of Malawi." Therefore, as we condemn these acts, we call upon government to accord this issue the attention and priority it deserves and to eradicate these barbaric, inhumane acts once and for all. We would like to stress that these vices are still happening and this reflects badly on our security systems and commitment towards guaranteeing human rights of all. We also call upon all stakeholders and the general citizenry to come together and see to it that these vices are urgently curbed and dealt with decisively. Community policing structures are the primary source of security, and must therefore be empowered to do the needful.

**SIGNED:**

# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FORUM

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**Endorsed By:**

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**Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR)**

**Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM)**

**Malawi Law Society (MLS)**

**Centre for Development of People (Cedep)**

**Youth and Society (YAS)**

**Citizens Forum for the Defense of Good Governance (CFDGG)**

**Civil Society Network on Transparency and Accountability (CSNTA)**

**Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre (MHRRC)**

**Public Affairs Committee (PAC)**

**Malawi Human Rights Youth Network (MHRYN)**

**Child Rights Information and Documentation (CRIDOC)**

**Coalition Against Violence of Women and Girls**

**Foundation for Children's Rights**

**Just Associates Southern Africa**

**Knowledge of the Laws of the Land (KNOLL)**

**Outreach Scout Foundation (OSF)**

**Women Lawyers Association (WLA)**

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**Issued 18<sup>th</sup> March 2018**