



PRESS STATEMENT

CHRR, CEDEP, APAM AND HRDC CONDEMN THE GRUESOME MURDER OF YASIN PHIRI IN NKHATABAY DISTRICT

“The killing is a sign government has failed to protect people with albinism”

Wednesday, January 2nd, 2019

The Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR), the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) and the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC), in solidarity with the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM), are deeply concerned and moved by the resurfacing of gruesome attacks on persons with albinism and strongly condemn the gruesome murder of Yasin Phiri, aged 54, of Mundiyege village in the area of T/A Fukamapiri in Nkhatabay district. This attack, which happened on the eve of the new year, represents a massive setback to progress achieved since 2014.

The killing of Yasin Phiri is the latest sign that government has failed to protect people with albinism. While attacks against persons with albinism have largely been stopped in countries like Tanzania and Kenya owing to good leadership, in Malawi people with albinism continue to be attacked despite government putting in place measures to stop these attacks. Even worse, government is failing to prosecute those responsible for the killings and is dragging its feet on the few cases that have actually made it to court. Statistics show that the rate at which cases are concluded is slow compared to other crimes investigations: only 30% out of 148 cases reported. This statistic does not inspire confidence. As a country we have come a long way; it's high time we made progress in protecting lives of persons with albinism. We, therefore, urge the authorities to do everything within their power to bring the perpetrators of this senseless crime to justice and to take all necessary measures for enhancing the safety of persons with albinism.

It is quite unfortunate that Malawians with albinism are among the most marginalized and vulnerable of the country's citizens, yet very little attention continues to be given to protecting them from violent crime.

According to facts we have collected, the murder of Mr Yasin Phiri occurred on the night of 31st December 2018 at Mundiyege Village in the area of T/A Fukamapiri in Nkhatabay district. On this particular night, the deceased was asleep in his room, when thugs broke into the house through a window and went straight to his bedroom where they started stabbing him. Thereafter they took the deceased at a distance of about 20 metres where they chopped off both of his arms and left. All this was taking place whilst his youngest son was inside the house after he was threatened with death if he shouted. A Postmortem revealed that the deceased had died due to severe loss of blood due to the multiple wounds and chopping of both arms.

This case is agonizing and profoundly frustrating considering that just last month, on 10th and 11th December 2018, CHRR and CEDEP, together with APAM successfully commemorated the World Human Rights Day by holding a national stakeholders workshop where the need to enhance the protection of persons with albinism to prevent further attacks was emphasized. We call upon authorities and all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to implement the National Action Plan, which addresses the root causes of attacks on persons with albinism, including a nationwide awareness raising campaign, strengthened investigations and prosecutions, together with strengthened protection and victim assistance measures. As a vulnerable minority group, persons with albinism are in need of social and legal protection in order to enjoy the full spectrum of fundamental rights, including the right to life and freedom of movement.

It is quite unfortunate that despite the National Action Plan and public condemnation of the attacks by the President of Malawi and senior government officials, the violence has continued. It is also quite disheartening that although some individuals have been arrested, charged and convicted, the majority of crimes remain unresolved due, creating a climate of impunity as well as deep fear.

As we mourn the death of Mr. Yasin Phiri, we encourage the authorities to ensure a thorough, prompt and impartial investigation not only into his killing but also the killing of other persons with albinism, including MacDonald Masambuka, Joseph Kachingwe, Harry Mokoshoni and others, and bring all alleged perpetrators to justice.

The government of Malawi has obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to protect, promote and fulfil the right to life, dignity, personal security and safety for all people in Malawi, including vulnerable groups such as people with albinism, and ensure equal protection before the law. The Constitution of Malawi also places obligations on the government to protect the rights of all people, including persons with albinism.

Therefore, as we condemn the killing of Mr. Yasin Phiri, we urge the authorities to do everything within their power to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice and to take all necessary measures for enhancing the safety of persons with albinism in the country.

SIGNED:

Timothy Mtambo

Executive Director,

Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) and Chairperson of the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC)

Gift Trapence

Executive Director

Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP)

Overstone Kondowe

President

Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM)