

# MALAWI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



## **A CALL TO SUSPEND AND A MUTUAL REFLECTION ON THE CURRENT DEMONSTRATIONS**

The Malawi Human Rights Commission (the Commission) is greatly disturbed with the continued violence during public protests across the country. Once again, the expectation of the Commission, like everyone else's, was that these protests would be peaceful as has always been emphasised by the organisers, the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC). However, to the contrary, the protests have turned violent and ceased to be rights-based. Instead, they have become crime-based, resulting in destruction of property, looting of businesses and occasioning of various forms of violations of other equally important rights.

The Commission is particularly concerned with the recent attacks of the Very Reverend Dr Killion Mgawi, a member of the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), as well as shortlisting for targeting of other MEC members and officers with similar forms of violence. The Commission is also alive to social media reports of targeting of some participants and organisers of the protests with reciprocal violence. **The Commission condemns these merciless and irresponsible developments of violence in the strongest terms possible. The Commission does not believe that violence can solve the current disputes.**

The Commission is aware and appreciates that the Police have been available to provide security to property and people in all the routes officially designated for such demonstrations. However, it is greatly worrisome that the Police have been seen not to be active enough in especially protecting property of the people of Malawi as well as Government. As stated in its previous call, the Commission expects the Police to exercise such duty by bringing to book all those that abuse the right to demonstrate peacefully and unarmed.

The Commission has noted that this omission or inability by the Police to provide for the effective protection of public safety and the rights of persons makes both natural and legal persons vulnerable to protests, resulting in a sense of insecurity and stand-still of various business processes and public service delivery in the country. If not checked, this has the propensity to cause malady to the economy and eventual greater suffering of the people of Malawi.

These negative effects could be avoided if peaceful means of resolving the current electoral disputes were applied. This being the case, the Commission appeals to the organisers of the demonstrations, the HRDC, **to consider calling off the demonstrations for now and allow room for a reflection meeting with the Commission.** While the Commission does not want to appear to limit the enjoyment of the right to demonstrate, it nevertheless has a duty to ensure the protection of and respect for all other equally important rights as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi. The Commission believes that this is also the interest of HRDC. Therefore, the reflection meeting would enable HRDC and the Commission to reach a common position on the application of this duty.

The Commission also calls upon the leaderships of the various political parties to embrace peace in all their public utterances in line with the prayer in the National Anthem that God should keep Malawi "a land of peace". It has been greatly worrisome that a few leaders still use hate and provocative speech during post-election political meetings when peace is what a nation needs. **Otherwise, the Commission commends all those leaders who lately have been preaching peace.**

Further, the Commission appeals to all religious and faith-based leaders to prioritise the teaching of peace, love and unity during this season and beyond. Likewise, the Commission calls upon all traditional leaders to promote peaceful coexistence of all people, irrespective of their differences in political orientation. On its part, the Commission would soon be announcing its peace initiative in which all stakeholders and good meaning people of Malawi would be invited to participate.



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