

MALAWI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



MEDIA STATEMENT

'A CALL FOR THE RESPECT OF THE HUMAN DIGNITY, PERSONAL FREEDOMS, AND THE RIGHT TO LIFE OF OLDER PERSONS IN MALAWI'

The Malawi Human Rights Commission (the Commission) vehemently condemns the heinous and barbaric murders that occurred in Ntorongo Village within the jurisdiction of Senior Chief Tengani in Nsanje district. The Commission is deeply disturbed by the reported killing of two older women on 26th December 2023, allegedly driven by accusations of witchcraft. The killings, regrettably take us to a total of 25 killings in the year 2023 alone.

The innocent victims, identified as Magetsi Lazo and an unidentified newcomer to the village, fell prey to this appalling act of violence. According to preliminary reports received by the Commission, Jordan Chinayi, a nephew to one of the victims, is alleged to have brutally attacked the two women, accusing them of bewitching him.

The Commission acknowledges the prompt response of community members who intervened and successfully apprehended Jordan Chinayi who has since been handed over to the Tengani Police Unit for further investigation. Additionally, The Commission commends the Malawi Police Service for prompt investigations into the matter.

Overall, it is disheartening to note that such incidents continue to plague the Ntorongo village, and these gruesome events follow a similar occurrence and trend a year ago, where a couple lost their lives under similar allegations of witchcraft. This also comes on the heels of the similar murder of 83-year-old Elida Petro in Mulanje under the same allegation of witchcraft.

Similarly, the Commission laments a situation that occurred on 27th December 2023 where some irate community members of Mwanza Village, Traditional Authority (T/A) Chiwere in Dowa nearly buried alive Christina Chiwoko, woman aged 56, on similar accusations. This incident reminds us of similar ones in

Mzimba and Neno districts where elderly women accused of witchcraft were tortured while the community cheered on.

In this regard, the Commission, therefore, makes the following calls:

- 1) Parliament should expeditiously enact the Malawi Older Persons Bill in order to address the systemic stigma and prejudice that exist.
- 2) The courts, despite the usual challenges, should timely, diligently adjudicate on matters bordering on allegations of witchcraft. The Commission encourages the courts to be meting out stiffer punishments to all persons convicted of any offenses bordering on accusing another of practicing witchcraft as this may deter other would-be offenders.
- 3) All traditional, religious and political leaders should take a leading role in condemning the killings and sensitizing their subjects and congregations respectively about the evils of victimizing older persons over allegations of witchcraft
- 4) Households and communities should report to relevant authorities about incidents of discrimination against, abuse and torture of the elderly over witchcraft allegations.

The Commission extends its deepest condolences to the families and friends of the victims. The Commission remains committed to monitoring the situation closely and advocating for justice to be served in the face of such grave human rights violations.



Chikondi Chijozi
Chairperson
3rd January, 2024.