

MALAWI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



PRESS STATEMENT

2023 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS IN MALAWI A CALL TO RESPECT OF RIGHTS FOR ELDERLY PERSONS

The Malawi Human Rights Commission (the Commission) joins the International Community in commemorating the International Day of Older Persons (IDOPs) which falls on 1st October every year. Internationally, this year's IDOP is commemorated under the theme ***"Fulfilling the Promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Older Persons"***. This year's theme underscores our collective commitment to ensuring the dignity, respect, and well-being of older Persons. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), a cornerstone of human rights principles, recognizes the inherent dignity and equal rights of all individuals. The 2023 IDOPs reminds us all to recommit ourselves to the principles enshrined in the UDHR, and to honor the contributions of our elderly citizens by ensuring that their rights are respected, their voices are heard, and their lives are lived in dignity.

As we commemorate this imperative day, the Commission, in pursuance to its constitutional and statutory mandate, reaffirms its dedication to advocate for the protection and realization of these rights for our elderly population. The Commission, therefore, reminds the general public of the immeasurable contributions by the elderly to the growth and development of our nation. Furthermore, these senior citizens hold a wealth of wisdom, experience, and resilience, which must be cherished and celebrated. As such, the nation is duty-bound to provide unwavering support and respect for the rights and fundamental freedom of the elderly as enshrined in the Republic of Malawi Constitution and other human rights instruments.

The Commission is however aware of the challenges that elder persons continue to experience in Malawi that hinder full enjoyment and realization of their human rights. Notably, the older persons in Malawi have been subjected to unfounded allegations of practicing witchcraft. Witchcraft accusation has consequently resulted in subjecting older citizens to mob justice including but not limited to beating or stoning to death, property destruction, banishment from their villages, land dispossession and discrimination, and social exclusion. which has resulted in elder abuse, discrimination, limited access to healthcare, lack of food and social exclusion. These challenges have further worsened the vulnerability of senior citizens who lack the capacity to protect and defend themselves because of their old age.

The 2023 IDOP should, therefore provide the nation an opportunity to reflect on the challenges faced by older persons as highlighted. In this regard, the Commission calls upon the Government, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and all Malawians to take strategic actions and to join hands in creating an inclusive and age-friendly environment where the rights and dignity of older individuals are upheld.

As a matter of urgency, the Commission calls on the following actions from stakeholders:

1. The Government through the Ministry of Justice to expedite processes that will facilitate the enactment of the Older Persons law.
2. The Government through the Ministry of Gender, Community and Social Welfare, to swiftly facilitate the finalization of the Older Persons' Policy that succeeds the 2016 policy.
3. The media to positively portray issues concerning older persons highlighting their continued support and contribution to the development of their societies and the nation at large.
4. The judiciary to give priority to cases of mob violence associated with witchcraft accusations and consider imposing stiffer sentences on those convicted of such crimes. This could help deter such incidents and protect individuals from unjust harm and persecution due to superstitions and false beliefs.
5. Stakeholders, both state and non-state actors to work in synergies to enhance coordination and collaboration in implementing various interventions aiming at ending the attacks and mob violence against the country's senior citizens.

The Commission will continue to play its watchdog role in matters relating to any topical human rights issues including the rights of elderly persons.



Habiba Osman
Executive Secretary
This day, 1st October 2023