

## MALAWI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



### MEDIA RELEASE

#### **INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, 3<sup>RD</sup> DECEMBER, 2021.**

Malawi joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International Day for Persons with Disabilities designated on 3<sup>rd</sup> December every year. The importance of this day cannot be overstated. The commemoration seeks to increase awareness on gains to be derived from integration of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. For this reason, each and every year, on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, Malawi joins the rest of the world in commemorating this day and takes part in the promotion and protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights of Persons with Disabilities within its jurisdiction.

As was the case in 2020, the day will be commemorated amidst devastating effects and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This calls for reflection and soul searching on how as a country we are dealing with human rights issues concerning persons with disabilities . Internationally, the day is being commemorated under the theme **“Leadership and Participation of Persons with Disabilities towards an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 world”**. As a nation, Malawi decided to adopt the international theme as it resonates well with innumerable challenges faced by PWDs.

It is important to note that the 3<sup>rd</sup> December falls within the period of 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, launched on 25<sup>th</sup> November which is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women that culminates into 10<sup>th</sup> December, the International Human Rights Day. During this period, we are also called to prevent and eliminate violence against people with disabilities specifically, women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination.

Covid-19 has laid bare the persistent barriers and inequalities faced by over 1.5 million persons with disabilities and over 130,000 persons with albinism, who have been among the hardest hit by the pandemic. A recent study by the Malawi human rights Commission established, among others, that the planning, design and execution of COVID-19 responses did not involve PWDs in the consultation process to develop the COVID-19 prevention and control measures; there is lack of representation of PWDs or their organizations in almost all clusters responsible for designing the COVID-19 response mechanism in order to facilitate inclusion of issues concerning PWDs; there is some information documented of PWDs who succumbed to the COVID-19 related sickness. However, the available data does not disaggregate COVID-19 statistics of those who are sick or have died on the basis of disability to inform effective planning and execution of inclusive interventions; although testing and vaccination services were and are still available, they are not easily accessible and affordable to PWDs due to them paying for the hidden costs to travel to the available centres. In addition, PWDs have not been included as a priority group to access the services. In situation where a person with a disability required a COVID test certificate for travel, they were not exempted from paying the cost.

These findings are a testimony to the neglect of leadership, skills and participation of PWDs in Malawi's development agenda including during the time of pandemics and disasters. A disability-inclusive pandemic response and recovery should be guided by PWDs themselves.

As Malawi works towards a disability inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 nation, there is need to facilitate the inclusive of PWDs in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. This is possible through full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, increase accessibility and dismantling legal, social, economic and other barriers with the active involvement of PWDs and their representative organizations. It is also important therefore that government should expedite the operationalization of the Disability Trust Fund (DTF) as already approved in the 2021/22 national budget to cushion the impact of COVID-19 in the lives of PWDs in the country. The Commission calls upon Government to consider increasing allocation of resources to the DTF, operationalizing the National Coordination Committee on Disability Issues (NACCODI), enactment of the National Disability Bill and filling in of the vacant position of Special Advisor on Disability.

Finally, the Commission takes the opportunity to remind all stakeholders to continue mainstreaming disability issues at all levels of socio-economic development in Malawi in the spirit of *Leave No One Behind*. Failure to follow this path greatly jeopardizes Malawi's efforts towards achieving most of the sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030.



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Scader Louis  
**Chairperson**  
3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2021