

# **MALAWI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**



## **STATEMENT ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES IN MALAWI**

**Date: 05.11.2023**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The Malawi Human Rights Commission (the Commission) is an independent human rights institution established under Chapter XI of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi (“Constitution”). The Commission is mandated to promote and protect human rights in the broadest sense possible and to investigate violations of human rights on its own motion or upon complaints received from any person, class of persons or body. The Commission is further regulated by the Human Rights Commission Act (Cap. 3:08 of the Laws of Malawi) with regard to its powers, functions, duties, responsibilities and operations.

In line with its mandate, the Commission has been monitoring the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the country with keen interest and this statement presents the current socio-economic issues including food situation in the country. Further, the Commission has come up with recommendations to duty bearers for their immediate action.

## **2.0 HUNGER SITUATION IN MALAWI**

The Commission is deeply concerned with the persistent hunger situation in Malawi<sup>1</sup> with 3,000,000 people representing 15% of Malawi’s population experiencing high acute food shortage<sup>2</sup>. In addition, 5.9 million people were classified as stressed with eleven districts<sup>3</sup> from the Southern and Eastern Region classified a crisis.<sup>4</sup> The humanitarian nature of the crisis has therefore prompted the Commission to issue this press release observing that Government is not responding with a sense of urgency. The Commission is duty-bound to appeal to Government to ensure that the many facets and the real causes of humanitarian crisis must be examined and addressed. The Commission asserts that hunger and poverty not only threaten people’s lives but also their dignity.

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<sup>1</sup> Integrated food security phase classification: Malawi Acute Food Insecurity Report, 2023

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Balaka, Blantyre, Chikhwawa, Chiradzulu, Machinga, Mangochi, Mulanje, Nsanje, Phalombe, Thyolo and Zomba.

<sup>4</sup> Integrated food security phase classification: Malawi Acute Food Insecurity Report, 2023

### **3.0 DETERIORATING LIVELIHOOD IN THE COUNTRY**

The Commission has noted with concern the severe rising cost of living in the country that is directly linked to the high inflation rate. The Commission considers this to have direct bearing on the rising cost of living in the country for instance, as of September 2023 the inflation rate stood at 27.80%<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, data indicates that the food inflation rate stands at 36.8% whilst the non-food inflation rate stands at 17.2%<sup>6</sup>.

As a result of the high inflation trends, most Malawians have been rendered unable to afford basic needs such as food, housing, medication, education, transportation, electricity and water bills. For instance, recent reports indicate that Malawians are spending more on basic needs because of the rising cost of living. Latest available data provided by Centre for Social Concern (CfSC) shows that as of July 2023, a household of six was spending K378, 812 monthly representing an increase of K108, 013 from K 270, 799 in June 2022.

Malawians are also bracing for a 58.8 % increase in electricity tariff in the next four years<sup>7</sup> and this has further been compounded by government's decision to raise water tariffs<sup>8</sup>. All this is happening in the face of economic decline in the country and the average Malawian has been left to bear the burden. As a result, the current socio-economic situation in the country has greatly compromised the right to adequate standard of living for all Malawians and the Commission considers this as a grave violation of human rights.

### **4.0 CONTINUED DETEREORATING SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS IN MALAWI**

The Commission further notes that the worsening socio-economic situation has eroded the financial power of Malawians to afford basic needs and as a consequence, more people in urban and rural areas have plunged into poverty and destitution. The

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<sup>5</sup> <https://tradingeconomics.com>

<sup>6</sup> Malawi National Statistical Office, 2023

<sup>7</sup> Nation Newspaper of 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

Commission has confirmed that poverty and hunger stricken people are surviving on wild tubers-non-traditional wild food stuffs, unripe mango and pawpaw fruits in Phalombe district due to their inability to access maize—a staple food<sup>9</sup>. Non-availability of maize in Malawi’s ADMARC depots and its high cost if available in informal markets has rendered these people destitute. The Commission also notes that the rising cost of living has come at a time when the country is grappling with a high unemployment rate which currently stands at 91 percent<sup>10</sup>, high crime rate, shortage of forex, inconsistent supply of fuel, economic decline, corruption and shortage of drugs in hospitals. These negative trends have resulted into violations of the various human rights including right to health. The Commission cannot overemphasize the implications of the worsening socio-economic situation on the enjoyment of human rights by all Malawians.

The Commission is further concerned with reports that an estimated 4.4 million Malawians are experiencing a high acute food insecurity, and that the situation will persist until March 2024.<sup>11</sup> These factors have contributed to decreased food availability and limited access to food. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that households with limited financial resources are finding it increasingly challenging to purchase adequate food to meet their dietary needs.

The IPC analysis has pointed out that Malawi’s ongoing economic instability including forex shortages, high commodity prices, and inflation, is driving the food insecurity up and areas that are experiencing weather shocks are the worst hit. The situation has been worsened by the fact that Malawi’s import cover is below the internationally accepted standard of below 3 months<sup>12</sup>.

## **5.0 FOOD INSECURITY IN THE COUNTRY**

The Commission notes with concern that the worst hit population by food insecurity has limited access to food because of high prices and unavailability of staple maize in ADMARC depots. The current situation, is greatly compromising Malawians’ right to food. The

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<sup>9</sup> <https://malawi24.com/2023/09/11/hunger-stricken-communities-surviving-on-tubers>

<sup>10</sup> Malawi Government Data

<sup>11</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, July 2023-March 2024, Published on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2023

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

Commission would like to emphasize that access to adequate food is fundamental to the enjoyment of the right to food which is a constitutional right provided for under Section 30 on the right to development. Further, it is the State's obligation to protect the right to food entailing that the Government must ensure that it is not interfering with Malawians' access to food and in providing food to people in an emergency or in circumstances when self-provision is beyond their control. The government has a duty to fulfil the right to food for her citizenry.

The Commission is further concerned with the high prices of maize in the country which as of July 2023, stood at 104% higher than during the corresponding period last year<sup>13</sup>. Of greater concern is the fact that the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) has not been efficient in its operations.<sup>14</sup> The inefficiency has affected the availability and accessibility of staple food, maize and other agricultural products throughout the country resulting into negative impact on the right to food. The continued rising prices of the staple maize on the market is further violation of the right of Malawians to access food as the Government is unable to exercise its duty to protect her citizenry against the continued rise in the price of maize.

The Commission is also concerned at the impact of natural disasters such as the recent Tropical Cyclone Freddy on food availability for the survivors. Efforts by Government of Malawi to respect the right to food for the survivors of the Cyclone Freddy need to be enhanced as survivors in camps and after decommissioning of camps continue to bemoan challenges to access food<sup>15</sup>.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the foregoing, the Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. The Government of Malawi should address high inflation rates in the country to mitigate the high living costs among its citizens. The Commission expects the

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<sup>13</sup> Reported in The Daily Times Newspaper of 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Reported in The Nation Newspaper of 14<sup>th</sup> August 2023

<sup>15</sup> Cyclone Freddy Monitoring Report by MHRC, 2023

Government to implement this recommendation by the first quarter of the 2024 financial year.

2. The Government of Malawi should progressively address the fuel scarcity in Malawi to guarantee the supply and distribution of essential services in the country including medication, medical supplies and food supplies among others. The Commission expects the Government to implement this recommendation by the first quarter of the 2024 financial year.
3. The Government of Malawi should ensure to regulate the price of maize and other food items on the market to protect Malawians from private traders overcharging these products on the parallel market. The Commission expects the Government to implement this recommendation in the fourth quarter of the 2023 financial year.
4. The Government of Malawi should fast-track the restructuring and operationalization of ADMARC to guarantee the availability of maize to vulnerable Malawians at affordable prices. The Commission expects the Government to implement this recommendation from the fourth quarter of the 2023 financial year.
5. The Government of Malawi should expediently implement recovery strategies for all the survivors of Tropical Cyclone Freddy targeting at addressing the acute food shortage they continue to experience. The Commission expects the Government to implement this recommendation from quarter 4 of the 2023 financial year.
6. The Government of Malawi should enhance security in the borders to deal with illegal exportation of maize to neighbouring countries. The Commission expects the Government to implement this recommendation from quarter 4 of the 2023 financial year.



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**Chikondi Chijozi**

**CHAIRPERSON**

**05<sup>th</sup> November 2023**