



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **URGENT CALL FOR SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHTS OF THE ELDERLY**

The Malawi Network for Older Persons' Organizations (MANEPO) and Human Rights Commission, Malawi (MHRC) wish to condemn, in the strongest terms, the continued attacks and killings of older persons across the country over witchcraft allegations. Each and every week, there are occurrences of killings, beating, banishments and destruction of property belonging to older persons on allegations of practicing witchcraft. Currently, there are over 50 cases awaiting prosecution, some of which date back from 2014.

We wish to state that Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. More so, the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa, recently signed by His Excellency Dr. Lazarus Chakwera, calls for each African state to be responsible for developing and reviewing existing legislation to ensure older persons receive equal treatment and protection and ensure that law enforcement officers at all levels are trained to effectively interpret and enforce policies and legislation to protect the rights of older persons.

We also take this opportunity to remind the public that Malawi's Witchcraft Act of 1911 does not recognise existence of witchcraft and states that it is an offence to accuse anyone of practising witchcraft. We, therefore anticipate government's quick action to finalise the review of the Witchcraft Act of 1911 which will also provide protection to elderly persons against these attacks and other violations based on allegations of practicing witchcraft due to their age.

Whilst we are aware of government's efforts to stop the killing of elderly persons, including through the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators, we call for timely prosecution and stiffer punishments by the Judiciary which will deter would-be perpetrators and in turn safeguard the rights of elderly persons.

Further, even though the 2016 National Policy for Older Persons recognises the duty of the State to protect the rights of older persons, we also urge every person to promote and protect the rights of elderly persons by working hand in hand, with law enforcement agencies, including reporting all perpetrators to ensure they face the law. The public is reminded that the respect for human rights, including the rights of the elderly, is a responsibility for all of us.

Whilst we hold it that escalation of abuse, discrimination and even killings of older persons can be explained by continued failure by law enforcement agencies to prosecute those who accuse older men and women of practising witchcraft; the uncoordinated responses at various levels of the justice administrative system and the absence of structured community support systems continue to make Malawi one of the worst countries for older persons in Africa.

As Bishop Desmond Tutu said, *‘As we get older, our rights do not change. As we get older, we are not less human and should not become invisible. I want to tell the world that I count, that older the elderly in our country, a world that is free from want, free from harm and one in which every older person has the necessary means to lead a dignified, healthy men and women everywhere count’.*

This should inform the transformation we wish to see in older men and women’s lives in Malawi. It is a kind of change that is not beyond our reach. If we work together, we can make greater strides towards creating the world we want for and secure life.

**Signed on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023**



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