

MALAWI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



MEDIA RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – 3RD DECEMBER 2020

As Malawi joins the world in commemorating the International Day for Person with Disabilities designated on 3rd December every year, the importance of this day cannot be overemphasized. This is so because this year, we commemorate the day amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Internationally, the day is being commemorated under the theme ***“Building Back Better: towards a disability inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 world”***. Malawi will commemorate the day with the theme ***“Not all disabilities are visible”***.

The annual observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities was proclaimed in 1992, by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 47/3. The observance of the day aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilise support for the dignity, rights and wellbeing of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness to gains to be derived from integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. For this reason, each and every year, on the 3rd December, Malawi joins the rest of the world in commemorating this day and takes stock of the strides taken in the promotion and protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights of Persons with Disabilities within its jurisdiction.

It is important to note the 3rd December falls within the period of 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, launched on 25 November which is the International Day for the

Elimination of Violence Against Women that culminates into 10 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 discrimination.

Whilst recognizing that not all disabilities are immediately apparent, such persons including those with visible disabilities have suffered greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic period. During its monitoring mission on government initiated COVID-19 measures, the Commission found that generally there was lack of inclusivity in the entire programming. Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were not fully consulted on their requirements to preventing the spread of Covid-19. To this effect, their right to education, right to access health services, right to economic activity, right to access to justice, right to life, right to liberty, movement and security were under threat. The Commission has received reports of young girls with disabilities being defiled and abused.

Additionally, the Commission has noted with regret the resurgence of brutal killings of Persons with Albinism and exhumations of body tissues of Persons with Albinism. Also, there has been incidences of rape and defilement of women and girls with disabilities. So far, the Commission has handled six (6) of such cases and has noted that the legal processes to provide remedies have been slow and sometimes ineffective. The Commission therefore strongly condemns these acts and would like to call for stiffer penalties for all those involved in these inhumane acts.

As Malawi works towards a disability inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 nation, there is need to facilitate the inclusion of PWDs in the prevention and treatment of COVID -19. It is vital that persons with disabilities take a central role in planning and implementing programmes affecting their lives in order to fulfill the notion of ***“Nothing For Us without Us”***. It is of prime importance therefore that government should develop

programmes to cushion the impact of COVID-19 in the lives of persons with disabilities in the country.

Finally, the Commission takes the opportunity to remind all stakeholders to mainstream 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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Rev. Patrick Semphere
Chairperson.

25th November, 2020