



PRESS STATEMENT

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS COALITION

STATEMENT ON THREATS AND ATTACKS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

We, the members of the Human Rights Defenders Forum, wish to express concern over the worsening levels of governance as events build up to the 2019 polls. We have noted the increase attacks of media personal since May this year. Few weeks ago, the Malawi Police attacked two journalists; Musase Cheyo and Towera Kumwenda from Zodiak Broadcasting Station (ZBS) whilst on duty in Mzuzu City yet the Police have the duty to protect everyone. Today we are in receipt of reports of an assault on veteran journalist and social commentator, Idriss Ali Nassah at Shoprite shopping complex in Blantyre.

We, the undersigned, wish to reiterate that the Constitution of Malawi upholds freedom of expression as a central pillar of a democratic and free society. Therefore, to impede the exercise of this right is not only an annulment of human rights but also an affront to the flourishing of a society where people can speak freely without fear of being attacked and assaulted.

We, the Human Rights Defenders, were of the view that the attacks of the journalists by the Police and party supporters will come to an end the moment the Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology, Honourable Nicolas Dausi apologised to the media fraternity during MISA Malawi awards ceremony at Mount Soche Hotel in Blantyre. However it is disheartening to note that contrary to Chapter IV of the Malawi Constitution which commits the State to the protection of human rights “of all the peoples of Malawi,” therefore, there has been no effort by the State to wholeheartedly condemn these acts. Human Rights Defenders among others namely Gift Trapence, Timothy Mtambo, Billy

Mayaya, Onjezani Kenani are persistently receiving anonymous phone calls and threats in an attempt to thwart their efforts to demand accountability on the MK 145 million scandal which has implicated the President.

In the same vein, members of Human Rights Defenders Forum, are receiving additional threats from anonymous persons on their calls to suspend the appointment of the Inspector General of Malawi Police, Rodney Jose, implicated in the report by the Commission of Inquiry on the murder of a former Polytechnic student, Robert Chasowa who was found dead at the campus premise in 2011. The issue is a matter of public record, We, therefore, call upon the Commission of Inquiry which was assigned to establish the truth of the matter based on what the report said. In the absence of the report, We, the Human Rights Defenders, shall not cowed into fear and silenced by anyone until this matter is resolved and the truth is published. No amount of threats and intimidation will force us to relent until justice is served.

We have information that State sponsored CSOs would want to be spreading propaganda in order to tarnish the image of mainstream Human Rights Defenders as well as undermine advocacy interventions on the 145 Million corruption scandal linked to the President.

We, the Human Rights Defenders condemn these acts, we call upon the government, Religious Leaders, all party players and other stakeholders in Malawi to work together to eradicate these barbaric, and cruel acts once and for all. Let us safeguard our hard won democracy, not only as we move towards a volatile period of elections, but more importantly as a duty owed towards all the citizens of this country.

In view of the above we make the following demands.

- The Police must abide working principles to institute investigations and arrest all cuprist connected to making threats directed to all Human Rights Defenders.
- The Police to assure Malawians that they shall desist from partisanship in terms of discharging their duties. As such, they must, at all times, protect freedom of expression, assembly among other rights
- We demand the DPP to stop using the youth to advance political violence against its critics

Signed by

Timothy Mtambo Chairperson HRDC

Giff Trapence – Vice Chairperson HRDC

Date: 5th July 2018