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Press briefing notes on People with albinism

Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Rupert Colville**Location:** Geneva**Date:** 27 March 2015**Topic:** People with albinism

We welcome last week's strong statement by the President of Malawi, sharply condemning the attacks on people with albinism. President Mutharika also called on security agencies to be placed on high alert, to arrest people responsible for such attacks and provide maximum protection to people with albinism.

The President's statement was followed up on Tuesday (24 March), by Malawi's Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, Patricia Kaliati, who unveiled a five-point plan of action, which includes:

1. The development of an education and awareness programme, with the organization of national and local public meetings and increased cooperation with civil society organisations
2. The strengthening of community policing structure and the allocation of adequate police forces in the districts most affected by the attacks
3. The undertaking of research to understand the root causes of the problem and what is done with the body parts of people with albinism
4. The establishment of a team of lawyers to support the prosecution in trials on albinism-related crimes and the provision of psycho-social support to victims of attacks
5. The review and enactment of existing legislation as well as the adoption of new laws deemed necessary to ensure the protection of people with albinism.

The Minister also said that the Government is thinking of appealing against some lenient sentences, without referring to any specific case. We would welcome this as well, and note that earlier this week a man received a sentence of just two years after being convicted of attempting to kidnap his 11-year-old niece Mina Jeffrey (one of the cases highlighted by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in his 10 March press release drawing attention to the recent spate of horrendous attacks in several countries, including Malawi).

We hope that this series of measures will result in a significant improvement in the security and well-being of people with albinism in Malawi, and urge the authorities to ensure that the Government's action plan is fully implemented without delay. In Tanzania, in early March, President Kikwete promised to put an end to the current wave of killings in that country, saying he will not allow them to escalate as they have done in previous years. We have been informed that the Tanzanian authorities, in particular the Attorney General's Chambers, have started to develop a plan of action to raise public awareness and fight against impunity. However it appears that most of the witchdoctors arrested over the past few weeks have now been released.

We once again call upon the Tanzanian authorities to take prompt and firm action to ensure accountability for the crimes committed against people with albinism and to take effective measures to protect this particularly vulnerable group. We also welcome the establishment yesterday by the Human Rights Council of an Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights of persons with albinism. This important new mandate will help give a voice to people with albinism and contribute to their protection, through a dialogue with concerned States, enhanced awareness raising and reporting, and the provision of advisory services and technical assistance.

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