



# **A joint submission by the Africa Albinism Network and the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM) to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the situation of persons with albinism in Malawi.**

Submitted on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2023

## **Submitting organization:**

Africa Albinism Network (AAN) and the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM), welcome the opportunity to submit a supplementary report for consideration during the 29th session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee) state review of Malawi (14 Aug 2023 - 08 Sep 2023). This report is to supplement the one sent to the committee in 2020 by Under the Same Sun (UTSS) and APAM.

**Africa Albinism Network:** The Africa Albinism Network (AAN) protects people with albinism in Africa from targeted violence, ritual attacks, and discrimination. Hundreds of cases of killings, mutilations, and discrimination have been reported against them in the last decade across 29 countries in the region. Perpetrators target mostly women and children. To protect people with albinism, the Network works with local organizations to implement the African Union Plan of Action to End Attacks against people with albinism and to integrate the issues into local disability frameworks of support. It also conducts high-level advocacy at the AU and UN to ensure government support in this process while developing the capacity of

albinism groups to take this work forward in a supported, strategic and sustainable manner.

**Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM):** APAM is an advocacy organization whose mandate is to promote the advancement of the rights of persons with albinism (PWAs) in Malawi. The Organization's vision is to see a community of PWAs enjoying full human rights and sustainable livelihoods. Its mission is to strengthen the capacity of members so that they can plan, develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate effective programs designed to benefit PWAs in Malawi. APAM's goal is to create equitable, enterprising, violence-free, and healthy communities towards the improvement of the lives and conditions of PWAs. APAM's primary memberships are all PWAs in Malawi.

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#### **Introduction**

This report is a supplement to the initial report submitted by the Under The Same Sun (UTSS) and the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM) in 2020 to the CRPD Committee. This report is based on AAN's own internal research as well as firsthand information and experience of albinism groups in Malawi, credible media reports, a Concept paper on addressing challenges in the implementation of the national action plan for persons with albinism by Malawi Human Rights Commission as well as the report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism. It centers on the issues and challenges that surround and confront persons with albinism (PWA) in Malawi especially harmful practices targeting them including attacks and grave violations.

## **A. COMPLIANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

### **1. Article 10, 15, and 16: Right to Life, Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and Freedom from exploitation, violence, and abuse**

Since our previous report in 2020, several disturbing harmful practices aimed at individuals with albinism in Malawi have come to light, infringing upon their fundamental right to life. A significant number of individuals with albinism in Malawi still reside in constant fear of being targeted. The escalating trend of grave desecration poses the greatest concern for families of persons with albinism. Even the dried bones of the dead with albinism are hunted. Women and children are most at risk of being targeted because of their intersectional vulnerability. These acts of violence and abuse violate articles 10, 15, and 16 of the CRPD to which Malawi is a party to. Presented below are documented instances of attacks in Malawi, compiled by Under the Same Sun (UTSS) through reliable sources, including media reports.

- On Sunday 25 June 2023, at around 2 PM local time in the village of M'maliha in Blantyre (Southern Malawi), people passing by the graveyard of a 34-year-old man with albinism who died of skin cancer on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, noticed that his grave had been tampered with and they informed the village chief. The police were later called and informed about a grave violation and exhumation. Together with local leaders, Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM) and the victim's relatives led further investigations to visit the site to identify the body. It was discovered that the body had been removed. The criminals amputated both lower limbs from the hip, and the upper limbs from the shoulder, leaving his torso. The remains were securely reburied
- On 1st May 2023, a 48-year-old man with albinism was attacked in the village of M'boola in the Chiradzulu District in eastern Malawi. The man was living in a displacement camp after being forced to leave their village due to flooding cause by Cyclone Freddy. On May 1st, the victim reported leaving

the camp to visit his home. At around 7 pm, while on his way back to camp, he was attacked by a group of unknown assailants causing injuries to his head and left arm with a knife. He screamed for help, the assailants ran off and he managed to reach a nearby house where he was able to call his family for help.

- On January 31, 2023, a young man with albinism from Tezanga village, T/A Chiwalo District of Phalombe was reported missing to the Nambozo Police unit on the morning of this date at around 1:30 am by his relatives. He lived with his 70-year-old mother, and he went out during the night of January 29, 2023, and never returned. His relatives searched for him in the area during the day on January 30, 2023, they only managed to find one shoe and a hat belonging to the victim in a field at Namuli Village in T/A Chilawo, District Phalombe.
- On the Night of November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, at 11pm in Mawawa Village, near the town of Kasungu, in central Malawi, a young three-year-old girl with albinism was reportedly asleep in bed with her grandmother when an unidentified assailant broke into the house. The man stabbed the young girl and amputated her arm before fleeing with it. Police are still searching for the suspect.
- On 16<sup>th</sup> October 2022, criminal gangs exhumed the body of a young man with albinism who hailed from Sitima village in the area of Traditional Authority Masumbankhunda, Lilongwe district. He died of skin cancer on April 7, 2022, and was laid to rest the following day. However, six months after his burial, the unknown criminal gangs exhumed his body. It is believed that they cut and went away with body parts including legs and arms, leaving his body with the head and chest only. The remains were reburied after advice from Malawi Police Service. However, the reburial was not made with concrete which still brings fears among persons with albinism in Malawi and the community members in the village regarding the security of the remains.

These attacks are incredibly violent and cruel, causing immense harm to the victims and violating their basic right to life and physical safety. The consequences of these

attacks and threats are far-reaching, affecting the ability of both children and adults with albinism to live fulfilling lives, learn, work, and access services on an equal footing with others. We urge the Government of Malawi to take stronger actions to protect persons with albinism and ensure their well-being.

## **2. Challenges Implementing the National Action Plan on Albinism in Malawi**

In line with the African Union Plan of Action on Albinism in Africa, we emphasize the importance of Malawi's implementation of its National Action Plan on Albinism. This comprehensive and multisectoral plan aims to address the human rights violations and other challenges faced by persons with albinism in the country.

However, we express concern over the delay in reviewing and renewal of the National Action Plan which expired in 2022, and the reduction in government funding allocated for the implementation of its activities.

According to the Malawi Human Rights Commission, the implementation of the NAP has encountered several challenges including,<sup>1</sup>

- Many institutions assigned to implement NAP activities have not yet started due to a lack of capacity.
- There is limited awareness among implementing institutions' staff members about the existence and objectives of NAP.
- Inadequate and delayed funding has further hindered progress, with most institutions receiving no financial support. Even among the few institutions that received funding, partners, and persons with albinism were not fully involved.
- Poor coordination and communication among implementing institutions and partners, exacerbated by the absence of the National Level Albinism Technical Committee, have contributed to slow progress.

The commission also noted in its monitoring report that, despite these challenges, the limited NAP activities that were implemented have shown positive outcomes in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://africaalbinismnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/163733251207968ejzeial1h-1.pdf>

terms of increased human rights protection, enhanced security, and improved access to education for persons with albinism.<sup>2</sup> This then suggests that proper implementation, adequate allocation of resources to NAP activities, and constant monitoring and evaluation of the NAP would tremendously improve the human rights situation of persons with albinism in Malawi. With this in mind, we offer the following recommendations below.

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. Review, Renewal/Extension of the National Action Plan for Persons with Albinism beyond 2022:** It is essential to conduct a comprehensive review of the current National Action Plan for Persons with Albinism in Malawi. This review should involve relevant stakeholders, including government officials, representatives from organizations working with persons with albinism, and persons with albinism themselves. The purpose of the review should be to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the existing plan and identify areas for improvement. The review process should also ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives to create a more inclusive and representative plan.
- 2. Capacity building for stakeholders responsible for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Persons with Albinism:** To ensure the successful implementation of the National Action Plan, it is imperative to invest in capacity-building initiatives for all stakeholders involved. Training programs should be developed and conducted to enhance the knowledge and skills of government officials, healthcare professionals, educators, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations working with persons with albinism. The capacity-building efforts should focus on raising awareness about the challenges faced by persons with albinism, promoting inclusive policies and practices, and fostering a culture of respect and acceptance.
- 3. Adequate allocation of funds for the implementation of the National Action Plan:** One of the critical factors for the successful execution of the National

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<sup>2</sup>As above

Action Plan is the availability of adequate financial resources. It is recommended that the government of Malawi allocates sufficient funds to implement the identified activities and interventions outlined in the plan. Additionally, efforts should be made to explore potential partnerships with international donors, philanthropic organizations, and private sector entities to secure additional funding for the plan's implementation. Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should also be established to track the utilization of funds and ensure transparency and accountability.

These recommendations aim to strengthen the National Action Plan for Persons with Albinism in Malawi and create an enabling environment for the enjoyment of their rights including the most fundamental right to life and ultimately, their social, inclusion. We strongly believe that by implementing these suggestions, Malawi can make further significant strides in addressing the protection of persons with albinism in the country.