

A joint submission by the Africa Albinism Network and the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM) to the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on the situation of Women impacted by albinism in Malawi

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The [Africa Albinism Network \(AAN\)](#) works to protect the rights of people with albinism in Africa from targeted violence, ritual attacks, and discrimination through the promotion of the [AU Plan of Action on albinism \(2021-2031\)](#) human rights advocacy and the capacity development of albinism groups.

Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM) is an advocacy group in Malawi that aims to advance the rights of individuals with albinism (PWAs). Their vision is to enable PWAs to have complete human rights and sustainable livelihoods. Their mission involves empowering members to create and manage effective programs for the benefit of PWAs. APAM strives to establish fair, thriving, safe, and healthy communities to enhance the well-being of PWAs.

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Questions for the Government of Malawi

- What concrete steps is the Malawian government taking to enhance sustained specific measures with the aim of mitigating ritual attacks against women and girls with albinism?
- What actions is the Malawian government pursuing to enhance the allocation of resources for the effective and continuous execution of the National Action Plan on Albinism in Malawi?
- What specific measures is the government of Malawi currently undertaking to ensure the review, renewal, and extension of the National Action Plan on Albinism?

Introduction and Methodology

This report is based on AAN's own internal research as well as firsthand information and experience of the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM), 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 women impacted by albinism in Malawi especially harmful practices targeting them including attacks and grave desecrations amid stigma and discrimination.

From 2018 to 2022, Malawi adopted and implemented a National Action Plan on albinism which was developed by government in collaboration with civil society including albinism groups and leaders. The country was one of the first in the region to do so. While commendable, the plan has met challenges in implementation which can be tackled. However, the government is yet to review and renew the plan and is also yet to allocate a budget to continue the measures in the plan.

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

1. Article 6: States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.

Since 2017, several disturbing harmful practices aimed at individuals with albinism, particularly women and girls in Malawi have come to light including over 122 cases of attacks, infringing upon their fundamental right to life. An estimated half of reported victims are women and girls with albinism. Others continue to live in perpetual fear of becoming victims of these attacks, often carried out for ritualistic motives. Mothers of children with albinism, who are often abandoned after the birth

of their children with albinism bear the brunt of childcare and protection of their children, while often living in socio-economic poverty.

The escalating trend of grave desecration also poses concern for families of persons with albinism. Even the dried bones of the dead with albinism are hunted. Women and children with albinism are most at risk of being targeted because of their intersectional vulnerability. These acts of violence and abuse violate articles 6 of CEDAW a treaty to which Malawi is a signatory. Presented below are documented instances of attacks targeting women and girls in Malawi, compiled by Under the Same Sun (UTSS), a foremost organization in albinism advocacy.

- On July 5, 2023, at around 10 pm, a young girl with albinism from the district of Dowa in Central Malawi survived an attempted trafficking. The girl's mother and her two children were asleep, when the mother was woken up by noises at the door. As she went to see what was happening, she reached for the door while someone was trying to break into her home using a machete. She tried to pull the machete from the intruder, but they resisted. When she opened the door, she saw that a man was running away but because it was dark, she couldn't identify the person. [Editorial note: The mother has a third son with albinism who was relocated by civil society organizations working locally on albinism, namely Standing Voice and APAM after surviving a similar incident on April 17, 2017, in Ntshisi District. One of the perpetrators allegedly includes the victim's uncle who tried to abduct, kill, and sell the then 2-year-old child. The police found and arrested the perpetrators. The mother lives in fear now and is separated from the younger child who was moved to a relatively safe place by civil society]
- On the Night of November 30th, 2022, at 11pm in Mawawa Village, near the town of Kasungu, in central Malawi, a young three-year-old girl with albinism was 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 the night of the 25th to 26th of June 2022 in Tanlo village, the village headman who happened to be the uncle of a deceased person with albinism who was buried on October 10, 2021, reported that unknown perpetrators exhumed the body of his niece who was a 35-year-old woman who had albinism. This occurred in the village of Namazoma, TA Mabuka in the District of Mulanje. Bones belonging to her arms were found and were taken away by unknown perpetrators. The scene was visited by Mulanje police and CID personnel.
- In 2019, a girl with albinism was raped on the belief that intercourse with her could be a cure to HIV and AIDS.¹

These attacks are incredibly violent and cruel, causing immense harm to the victims and violating their basic right to life and physical safety. They affect the ability of women and girls with albinism to live fulfilling lives, learn, work, and access services peacefully and on an equal footing with others. The impacts of these attacks extend to mothers of children with albinism increasing their vulnerability. 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 renewing the National Action Plan which expired in 2022, and the reduction in government funding allocated for the implementation of its activities.

¹ Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA). The status of the rights of women with disabilities in Malawi: alternative report submitted to the committee on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) January 2022

According to the Malawi Human Rights Commission, the implementation of the NAP has encountered several challenges including,²

- Many institutions assigned to implement NAP activities have not yet started to implement their portions due to a lack of capacity.
- There is limited awareness among implementing institutions' staff members about the existence and objectives of the 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 in the implementation process.
- Poor coordination and communication among implementing institutions and partners, exacerbated by the absence of the once-established 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 terms of increased human rights protection, enhanced security, and improved access to education for persons with albinism.³ This 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 including women impacted by albinism in Malawi. With this in mind, we offer the following recommendations below.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Review, Renew and Extend the currently expired National Action Plan for Persons with Albinism beyond 2022:** It is essential to complete the review of the current National Action Plan for Persons with Albinism in Malawi. This review

² <https://africaalbinismnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/163733251207968ejzeial1h-1.pdf>

³As above

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 to 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, fostering a culture of respect and acceptance, and above all, providing technical and other support and information on how to effectively implement the National Action Plan.
3. **Adequate allocation of funds for the implementation of the National Action Plan:** 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, freedom from torture and exploitation, 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.