



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ARREST AND PROSECUTION OF THOSE INVOLVED IN STONING AN INNOCENT OLDER WOMAN TO DEATH ON WITCHFRAFT ALLEGATIONS

The Malawi Network for Older Persons' Organizations (MANEPO) wishes to condemn, in the strongest terms, the recent gruesome murder of an innocent older woman at Fumbwa village, T/A Tambala in Dedza district on baseless witchcraft accusations.

MANEPO wishes to remind all Malawians that it is very unbecoming for one, let alone older persons, to live under a cloud of suspicion. We passed the era when one could do what it pleases, without being restrained by the muscle of the law. It is imperative that everyone should use proper channels to address concerns, for one cannot concurrently play the roles of an accuser, prosecutor and judge.

Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. More so, the recently adopted African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa calls for each African state to be responsible for developing and reviewing existing legislation to ensure older persons receive equal treatment and protection and ensure that law enforcement officers at all levels are trained to effectively interpret and enforce policies and legislation to protect the rights of older persons.

The Malawi's Witchcraft Act of 1911 doesn't recognise existence of witchcraft and states that it is an offence to accuse anyone of practising witchcraft. The 2016 National Policy for Older Persons recognises the duty of the State to protect the rights of older persons in a country grappling with changes in traditional family values and the erosion of social support structures.

MANEPO, therefore, calls upon the Malawi Police Service (MPS) to immediately arrest and prosecute every person involved this barbaric and heinous act. We hold it that escalation of abuse, discrimination and even killings of older persons can be explained by continued failure by law enforcement agencies to prosecute those who accuse older men and women of practising witchcraft. The

uncoordinated responses at various levels of the justice administrative system and the absence of structured community support systems continue to make Malawi one of the worse countries for one to grow old in Africa.

MANEPO demands speedy revision of the Witchcraft Act, in particular repeal of Section 6, aimed at preventing further discrimination, abuse and violence against innocent older men and women accused of practicing witchcraft. At the same time, MANEPO expects government to demonstrate political will by guaranteeing the safety and protection of the elderly in this country.

Bishop Desmond is quoted saying, *'As we get older, our rights do not change. As we get older, we are not less human and should not become invisible. I want to tell the world that I count, that older men and women everywhere counts'*.

This should inform the transformation we wish to see in older men and women's lives in Malawi. It is a kind of change that is not beyond our reach. If we work together, we can make greater strides towards creating the world we want for older men and women in our country, a world that is free from want, free from harm and one in which every older person has the necessary means to lead a dignified, healthy and secure lives.

Signed on 20 October 2020



**Andrew Kavala
MANEPO**