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Commemorative Statement on World Refugee Day, 2024

Issued today, 20 June 2024

Each year, on June 20th, the global community comes together to celebrate World Refugee Day, a day dedicated to honoring the resilience and courage of those who have been forced to flee their homes. This International Day of Observance serves as a powerful reminder of our collective responsibility to champion the rights of refugees, support their integration into society, and advocate for sustainable solutions to their plight.

World Refugee Day illuminates the rights, needs, and aspirations of refugees, galvanizing political will and mobilizing resources to ensure that refugees not only survive but thrive. While it is crucial to protect and enhance the lives of refugees every day, this dedicated day focuses global attention on the pressing issues faced by those escaping conflict and persecution. The activities and events held on this day provide valuable opportunities for communities worldwide to demonstrate their solidarity with refugees and to support their journey toward a better future.

As Malawi joins the global community in commemorating World Refugee Day, the undersigned civil society organisations seek to highlight the urgent and critical situation faced by refugees within our borders. On March 27, 2023, the Government of Malawi issued a directive requiring all refugees residing outside designated areas to return to the camp within 14 days. This directive has been enforced with excessive and disproportionate force by the Malawi Police Service, leading to severe human rights violations and the unlawful treatment of refugees.

The public information on this directive was minimal, significantly limiting public discourse and the opportunity to hold the government accountable. During the relocation process, CSOs documented alarming human rights abuses. On May 17 and 18, 2023, 505 individuals, including 202 males, 89 females, and 117 children, were detained under appalling conditions at Maula Prison. These refugees endured overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, physical abuse, and were denied access to legal representation and basic necessities, including menstrual pads. Families were heart-wrenchingly separated, and self-reliant refugees were stripped of their livelihoods due to forced encampment.

Over the past year, refugees in Malawi have faced a litany of abuses, losing property and valuables during government-sanctioned relocations. Despite the time that has elapsed since the exercise, government agencies have yet to account for the lost property, including confiscated goods from Mgoni and Area 25 in Lilongwe. The report on forced opening of containers and subsequent selling of confiscated goods has been shrouded in secrecy.

As we join the world in celebrating the resilience of refugees, we must also seek justice for those in Malawi whose rights have been egregiously violated. We are particularly troubled by the

conduct of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services for 'denying' arriving asylum seekers in Karonga their legal right to protection. As of Thursday, 20 June 2024, there were over 80 asylum seekers sleeping outside the Immigration Offices in Karonga. They have been denied access to Karonga transit shelter by authorities due to their lack of relevant immigration papers. This group has been camped at the immigration offices for over 3 weeks now without access to food or shelter, leading many to rely on charity for survival. This practice is not only illegal but contravenes international law.

Despite these challenges, we acknowledge the positive steps taken by the government of Malawi to address legal and policy gaps that have denied refugees and asylum seekers fundamental rights. The establishment of a Special Law Commission to review the Refugee Act represents a significant stride towards rectifying systemic issues within the refugee sector in Malawi.

We firmly believe in treating all human beings with dignity and humanity. Refugees are entitled to human rights, and seeking refuge is not a crime. It is essential to prioritize the protection and fulfillment of their rights, in alignment with both international law and Malawi's Constitution.

Signed by:



Victor Mhango
Chairperson
Civil Society Coalition on Migration (CCM)

On behalf of

CHREAA

Youth and Society (YAS)

INUA Advocacy

Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP)

Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)

Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR)

Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC)

Church and Society – Livingstonia Synod

Centre for Democracy and Economic Development Initiative (CDEDI)

National Advocacy Platform (NAP)

Ukhondo Services Foundation (USEF)