



International Panel of
Parliamentarians
for Freedom of Religion
or Belief



AfriPAHR
AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARIANS ASSOCIATION
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

27 October 2023

Hon Nancy Tembo
Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Malawi

Dear Madam,

We write to you on behalf of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB) and our partner in the African continent, the African Parliamentarians Association for Human Rights (AfriPAHR). We write to you as a global network of parliamentarians from diverse political, religious, and geographical backgrounds committed to promoting and protecting the freedom of religion or belief for all.

On 10 October 2023, the UN General Assembly elected Malawi as one of the 15 new Member States of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 2024-2026 term. This appointment reflects the international community's trust in Malawi's commitment to advancing human rights nationally, regionally, and globally. Countries chosen for the Human Rights Council (HRC) are expected to showcase their dedication human rights standards, encompassing their complete cooperation with all United Nations mechanisms.

Your country has been known as one that has worked in upholding the Human Rights of your citizens. Malawi has acted as a pillar for maintaining peace and religious co-existence. We are excited about the vital role you will play globally in advancing human rights, particularly freedom of religion or belief, during your tenure on the Council. We urge you to uphold freedom of religion or belief as part of the human rights framework.

We are aware of the landmark ruling in Zomba in May 2023, when the High Court of Malawi ordered the government to allow Rastafarian students with dreadlocks to enroll in all public schools, a verdict marking the end of a three-year legal battle in which two students sued the



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government over its requirement that they cut their hair to promote uniformity in school. We urge Malawi to continue enabling equal access to education for all its citizens and implement public policies that acknowledge that the right to education and freedom of religion or belief are both part of the human rights discourse, being that they are inalienable, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated.

We request that Malawi consider freedom of religion or belief challenges seriously and take measures to ensure that all its citizens' freedom of religion or belief is upheld and protected. Malawi should actively recognize that the right to freedom of religion or belief protects various religious practices and fundamentally encompasses the rights of individuals who identify with non-religious beliefs or no belief at all, such as atheists and agnostics. By doing so, Malawi can further strengthen its commitment to human rights and contribute positively to the work of the Human Rights Council.

We, the Steering Group of IPPFoRB and the Steering Group of AfriPAHR, are willing to engage in a constructive dialogue on this matter and are open to collaborating with the Malawi authorities to find solutions that respect the rights and freedoms of all Malawi citizens.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We welcome any discussions on improving the freedom of religion or belief in Malawi.

Sincerely,



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