

Mandate of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism

Ref.: AL MWI 1/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

14 May 2026

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 55/18.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information I have received concerning disturbing reports of attacks, grave violations targeting persons with albinism and prolonged delays in the investigation and prosecution of cases which fuel trauma, fear, and impunity in affected areas in Malawi.

According to the information received:

[REDACTED], a woman with albinism, was born on 15 June 1969 and died in 2022. She was buried at a local cemetery in the Group Village Headman Kapala, which is located within the jurisdiction of Traditional Authority Nsakambewa in Dowa District, Malawi.

On 12 January 2026, the grave of [REDACTED] was desecrated by unknown individuals, who reportedly dismantled the concrete grave and exhumed the body. Body parts of the deceased, including hands, elbows and fingers were severed from the body and taken away by the perpetrators.

[REDACTED] was a farmer by profession and lived in the Dowa District of Malawi for her entire life. As a person with albinism, she faced discrimination, stigma and vulnerabilities to attacks and abduction whenever she ventured out for work or personal errands. The family recalled an incident several years ago when a man wielding a machete followed [REDACTED] home which instilled fear in her and the prospect of an attack as a vulnerable person with albinism. Prior to her death, the family ensured that she would always be accompanied by a family member for her protection.

Following the discovery of the desecrated grave and stolen remains, the local community and the family of the deceased reported the incident to law enforcement authorities. A community-led search was mounted to retrieve the remains, but no progress was made in this regard.

Sources in Malawi have reported that since 27 January 2026, more than five suspects had been apprehended, including the village headman from the village where [REDACTED] lived prior to her death. Sources have further stated that four suspects pleaded guilty, while the village headman was released by the court due to insufficient evidence. Reportedly, two additional suspects, including a businessman from the neighboring Ntchisi District, pleaded not

guilty. While I welcome the efforts by law enforcement authorities, which reportedly resulted in the arrest of some of the suspects, the persistent occurrence of these incidents further highlight the sense of impunity of crimes committed against persons with albinism even after their death.

Without prejudging the accuracy of the information received, I would like to express deep concerns over the desecration of the graves of persons with albinism in Malawi in the past year, which constitute a contravention of Malawi's own domestic laws, including crime of trespassing under section 306(a) of Malawi's Penal Code, as well as the fraudulent removal of body parts in contravention of Malawi's Human Tissue Act (1962) and the Anatomy Act (1990).

I am concerned by the seeming rise in the trade of body parts of persons with albinism, including reports of cross-border trafficking of these parts across the borders of Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique, often obtained through abduction, violence, killings and desecration of graves of persons with albinism. The rise in trafficking of body parts has significantly increased anxiety and vulnerability of persons with albinism, whose lived experiences include a constant state of fear both in their homes and whenever they go out for routine livelihood chores

The abovementioned incidents appear to be a part of a larger disturbing pattern of human rights violations perpetrated against persons with albinism in the country, including abductions, attacks, disappearances, as well as killings and dismemberments for the purpose of witchcraft rituals. I am further concerned at the lack of robust investigations that have failed to effectively hold perpetrators to account for these violations and at the likelihood of these violations continuing, resulting in the physical and mental integrity of persons with albinism being threatened, as they continue to live in fear of further attacks and killings.

Such cases and the negative impact they have on persons with albinism have been addressed by the Independent Expert on albinism on different occasions through previous communications to your Excellency's Government in 2018 (Malawi: AL MWI 1/2018); in 2019 (Malawi: JAL [MWI 1/2019](#) ; Malawi: JUA [MWI 2/2019](#) and Malawi: JUA [MWI 3/2019](#)); in 2021 (Malawi: JAL [MWI 2/2021](#) and Malawi: JAL [MWI 1/2021](#)); in 2022 (Malawi: JUA [MWI 4/2022](#)) and 2023 (Malawi: JAL [MWI 2/2023](#)). I am further concerned at the lack of meaningful progress to hold the perpetrators of these violations to account as demanded by the family of the victims and as possible deterrence.

Violations against persons with albinism are serious human rights issues and addressing them requires a multifaceted approach as outlined in your Excellency's Government's National Action Plan on persons with Albinism in Malawi, which was launched in June 2018 by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, while also aligning with the African Union Plan of Action to End Attacks and Other Human Rights Violations Targeting Persons with Albinism in Africa (2021–2031).

It is also worth noting that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) – of which Malawi is a member – adopted a Declaration on the Protection of Persons with Albinism at its summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, on 17 August 2024. The

Declaration acknowledges that persons with albinism in the SADC region have faced prejudice and stigmatization, as well as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Through the Declaration, SADC Member States reaffirm their commitment to the principles of nondiscrimination and underline that the situation of persons with albinism in the SADC region can be addressed by focusing on public education and awareness raising campaigns, effective law enforcement, improved specialized services and bringing to justice perpetrators of violence against persons with albinism.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is my responsibility, under the mandate provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to my attention, I would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide detailed information on, and where available the results of, investigations, medical examinations, and judicial or other inquiries carried out in relation to the above-mentioned case.
3. Please provide information on the measures that have been taken to strengthen protection of persons with albinism including the prevention of abductions, attacks and killings as well as measures to prevent further occurrence of desecration of graves.
4. Please provide any information on steps your Excellency's Government has taken with regards to mechanisms that support the recuperation of victims of albinism attacks ensuring mental, physical integrity and psychosocial support to families of deceased persons whose graves have been desecrated.
5. Please provide an update on the implementation of measures in the SADC Declaration on the Protection of Persons with Albinism, among which are measures to strengthen protection against attacks and assault on the dignity of persons with albinism.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

As persons with albinism continue to face violence and other intersecting forms of discrimination in Malawi, I call on your Excellency's Government to speedily put in place robust, practical and complementing measures and mechanisms, to ensure the full

protection of the rights of persons with albinism, including protection of graves of persons with albinism. In this regard, I would appreciate receiving assurances from you that the Government of Malawi will ensure a thorough investigation into the alleged desecration of graves of persons with albinism. As persons with albinism continue to face violence and other intersecting forms of discrimination in Malawi, I call on the government to put in place measures to address gaps and structural barriers within existing legal and policy framework, which prevent persons with albinism and their families from effectively accessing justice.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond
Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, I wish to draw your Excellency's Government's attention to articles 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Malawi acceded on 22 December 1993, and article 10 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified by Malawi on 27 August 2009, which guarantee the right to life and security of person and that no one is to be arbitrarily deprived of the right to life. Furthermore, under the CRPD, States must take all appropriate measures to protect persons with disabilities from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse (article 16), and to protect their integrity on an equal basis with others (article 17).

I would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the absolute and non-derogable prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment as codified in articles 2 and 16 of the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), to which Malawi is a party since 11 July 1996. Article 15 of the CAT provides that, "Each State Party shall ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made." The Committee against Torture has examined the particular situation of persons with albinism and emphasized that persecution and physical assaults leading to the death and mutilation of persons with albinism would fall under the scope of the Convention. Among the elements considered by the Committee is the impunity of perpetrators of such crimes (see CAT/C/BDI/CO/2).

I would also like to draw attention of your Excellency's Government to the provisions of the CRPD, particularly articles 10, 13, and 16. Article 10 reaffirms "that every human being has the inherent right to life" and requires State Parties to "take all necessary measures to ensure its effective enjoyment by persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others." Article 16, paragraph 1 of the CRPD requires State Parties to "protect persons with disabilities (...) from all forms of exploitation, violence, and abuse, including their gender-based aspects". Paragraph 2 of article 16 speaks directly to the obligation of States Parties to prevent violence, and paragraph 5 speaks to the necessity to end impunity and to ensure that instances of violence are identified, investigated, and, where appropriate, prosecuted. Article 16 overlaps with and fully reinforces article 17 on the obligations to protect every person's physical and mental integrity." In addition, paragraph 4 stresses that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote the physical, cognitive and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of persons with disabilities who become victims of any form of exploitation, violence or abuse, including through the provision of protection services."

In their Concluding Observations addressing the right to life for persons with albinism, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has expressed concern at the different forms of violence perpetrated against persons with albinism, including kidnappings, killings, and attacks for the purpose of witchcraft practices, and the absence of measures to protect victims and to prosecute and convict perpetrators.

The Committee urged the States where this type of violence was taking place to: (a) Promptly investigate all cases of violence against persons with albinism ensuring that they are appropriately prosecuted and punished; (b) Create shelters and redress services for victims of attacks including healthcare, counselling and free legal aid; and (c) Redouble efforts to raise awareness about the dignity and rights of persons with albinism and ensure the involvement of organizations of persons with albinism in any campaigns aimed at eliminating stigmatization and myths that underpin violence against persons with albinism (CRPD/C/KEN/CO/1 paras. 19 and 20).

States parties must enact a protective legal framework which includes effective criminal prohibitions on all manifestations of violence or incitement to violence that are likely to result in a deprivation of life, including, inter alia, ritual killings, desecration of graves and mutilation of bodies of the deceased and their use for commercial or ritual purposes. The criminal sanctions attached to these crimes must be commensurate with their gravity, while remaining compatible with all provisions of the Covenant.

Furthermore, according to principle 9 of the Principles of the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, there is an obligation to conduct thorough, prompt and impartial investigation of all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions, including cases where complaints by relatives or other reliable reports suggest unnatural death. The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death which in 2016 updated the original UN Manual on the Effective Prevention of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions of 1991; and the UN Principles on Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (1989), states that an investigation must be a) prompt; b) effective and thorough; c) independent and impartial; and d) transparent.

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The full texts of the human rights instruments and standards recalled above are available on www.ohchr.org and can be provided upon request.