

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate release

MenEngage Africa condemns harassment of women in Malawi and calls for men to stand up against this violence

The MenEngage Africa Network, and its member Men for Gender Equality Now Malawi (MEGEN), calls on the Malawian authorities to arrest and prosecute the men who recently stripped naked and beat up women in the Malawi cities of Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Blantyre simply because they exercised their right to wear trousers rather than dresses as their assailants insisted they do. Attempts by men to control women's right to dress and express themselves as they see fit have no place anywhere—and are certainly grossly out of line with the Malawian Bill of Rights.

We commend President Bingu wa Mutharika's strong stance on this issue, and the Malawi Police Service for trying to bring to justice anyone who attacks women in this way. In a statement, the President said, "I will not allow anyone to wake up and go on the streets and start undressing women and girls wearing trousers, because that is illegal".

Every woman and girl has the right to dress the way they wish, he added.

MenEngage Africa also conveys our solidarity to the approximately 2000 women and human rights activists who recently staged a protest against these disgusting attacks on women. We echo the call made by Malawi's first female Vice President Joyce Banda, to say no to abuse against women, and to highlight the need to fight for women's rights. Every woman and girl has the right to dress the way they wish.

Men and boys have an important role to play in standing up against this violence, challenging the use of violence by other men, and promoting women's rights. Men are a key part of the solution to gender-based violence prevention. The MenEngage Africa Network and MEGEN urges the Malawian government to take stringent measures and action to further investigate and arrest the perpetrators of this violence and make clear to the Malawian people that such acts of harassment and violence will be met with swift sanction. As a regional network committed to gender equality, MenEngage Africa is against all forms of violence, especially sexual harassment and assault as a weapon to quash women's freedom of expression, choice, movement, and association.

Speaking on this issue, Marcel Chisi, chair of MEGEN said, "I call on all men to stand up and challenge this violence. We must support women who, for many years, have spoken out to raise awareness on the need to end all forms of violence against women and girls. We must create spaces for men to speak to other men on how to challenge and stand up against domestic violence."

He added, "these terrible events also highlight the need to confront and interrogate harmful notions of masculinity. It is widely acknowledged that the ways in which men are often socialised to behave can lead to their use of violent behaviour, and we must work with men to promote alternative non-violent models of manhood. We must also highlight the ways in which men themselves are

imprisoned by their masculinity, and the benefits they stand to gain from greater gender equality within Malawi.”

MenEngage Africa believes that through working together, as men and women, we can end such violence and create a more just and gender equitable region.

END

About MenEngage Africa

MenEngage Africa is part of the Global MenEngage Alliance of NGOs and UN agencies that work to engage men and boys to achieve gender equality. The country networks in Africa bring together partner organisations working on gender-based violence, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, women’s rights, youth and child rights and abuse, masculinities, HIV, fatherhood, sexual and reproductive health and rights ,maternal health, refugees and migrants, and other issues. See www.menengage.org. The current chair of MenEngage Africa is Sonke Gender Justice Network. For further details, visit: www.genderjustice.org.za

About MEGEN

Men for Gender Equality Now [MEGEN-Malawi Chapter], a network of over 50,000 progressive men in Malawi who engage in community sensitization and education work, advocacy and campaigning to challenge unequal power relations between men and women, transform harmful masculinities into positive ones and put an end to Gender Based Violence (GBV). MEGEN has sister networks in Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Uganda, Namibia, Mozambique, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, DRC, Tanzania and Angola.

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