

URGENT ACTION

FEAR FOR SAFETY OF MISSING BABY WITH ALBINISM

A two year-old baby girl with albinism was abducted whilst sleeping beside her mother in Chiziya Village. Thousands of people with albinism live in fear of being abducted or killed in Malawi, where their body parts are being sold for use in witchcraft.

Unknown persons broke into the house where two year-old **Whitney Chilumpha** was sleeping with her mother in Chiziya village, Kasungu district and took the child. Mother and child went to bed on 3 April at 8pm, but upon waking up at 4am on 4 April the mother discovered the child was missing. She immediately alerted the neighbours who conducted a search but did not find the child. The case has been reported to the police but no arrests have been made and baby Whitney is still missing.

Three suspects have been arrested in Machinga district in connection with the abduction and killing of **Harry Mokoshoni**, a nine year-old boy with albinism. Among those arrested are an uncle of the child and a man previously arrested and convicted in 2015 for possession of bones of a person with albinism and fined 20,000 Malawian Kwacha (about US\$30).

Thousands of **people with albinism** live in fear of being abducted or killed in Malawi, where their body parts are being sold for use in witchcraft. At least 11 people with albinism are known to have been killed in Malawi since December 2014, while five others have been abducted during the same period and have not been found. In 2015 alone, 45 other crimes against people with albinism, include attempted abductions and opening up of graves in search of bones of dead people with albinism, were reported.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Calling for prompt, thorough and transparent investigations into the abduction and whereabouts of Whitney Chilumpha and for those suspected to be responsible to be brought to justice through trials that meet international standards of fairness;
- Urging the government to urgently provide effective protection for people with albinism including by protecting their right to life and personal security, in accordance with Malawi's international human rights obligations and commitments;
- Expressing concern over the safety and security of people with albinism in Malawi following reports of killings, abductions and attempted abductions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 MAY 2016 TO:

President of the Republic of Malawi
His Excellency Professor Arthur Peter
Mutharika
Office of the President and Cabinet
Private Bag 301
Capital City
Lilongwe 3
Malawi
Fax: +265 1 773 954/ 789 273
Salutation: Your Excellency

Inspector General of Police
Mr Lextam Kachama
National Police Headquarters
Private Bag 305
Capital City
Lilongwe 3
Malawi
Salutation: Dear Sir

And copies to:

The President
Bonface Massah
Association of People with Albinism
c/o FEDOMA
Private Bag 797
Limbe, Blantyre
Malawi
Email:
albinismassociationmw@gmail.com

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 51/16. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr36/3585/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Albinism is a rare, non-contagious, genetically inherited condition present at birth. Both parents must carry the gene for it to be passed on, even if they do not have albinism themselves. The condition is found in both genders, regardless of ethnicity and in all countries of the world. Albinism results in a lack of pigmentation (melanin) in the hair, skin and eyes, causing vulnerability to the sun and bright light. As a result, almost all people with albinism are visually impaired and are prone to developing skin cancer. There is no cure for the absence of melanin.

The majority of people living with albinism in Malawi live in rural areas in extreme poverty. Erroneous beliefs and superstitions have put the safety and lives of people with albinism at risk, including from killings, abductions, and mutilations. Ritual killings of people with albinism are influenced by superstitions and myths that their bones or body parts can bring riches. This has been the main basis even in cases of abductions, attempted abductions and other violence towards people with albinism in Malawi. The few perpetrators who have been arrested in the past have either been acquitted or given lighter sentences. Societal attitudes about albinism are not changing and people with albinism continue to be at risk of attacks with some children being abducted and sold by family members

Malawian President Arthur Peter Mutharika issued a statement on 19 March 2015 condemning attacks on people with albinism, and calling on police to arrest perpetrators and provide protection to people at risk of attack. Although some arrests were made, concerns remain about the inadequacy of police investigations and some perpetrators getting sentences which were not in line with the gravity of the crime.

A nine-year-old boy with albinism, **Harry Mokoshoni**, of Moto Village in Machinga district was abducted on the night of 26 February by a group of unidentified men who broke into his family's home. The men threatened his mother and injured her as they took the boy away. A head was discovered in a neighbouring village on 3 March. It was confirmed to have been that of Harry Mokoshini.

Eunice Phiri, a 53 year old woman with albinism, was tricked by three men, including her brother on 23 January to accompany them on a trip to Zambia. Eunice Phiri's body was found by a herdsman on 28 January with her arms chopped off in Kasungu National Park.

With attacks against people with albinism increasing, families have withdrawn children from schools for fear of attacks. Some people with albinism have moved to urban areas for safety. The right to freedom of movement for people with albinism has severely been restricted as many need to be accompanied by family members for their safety.

Name: Whitney Chilumpha and other people with albinism in Malawi

Gender m/f: Both

Further information on UA: 51/16 Index: AFR 36/3785/2016 Issue Date: 7 April 2016