



*MALAWI NETWORK OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS LIVING WITH OR PERSONALLY AFFECTED BY HIV AND AIDS  
(MANERELA+)*

**STATEMENT ON THE FAITH COMMUNITY REACTION OVER THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT  
CASE BY TWO PERSONS SEEKING CLARITY ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL STANCE ON  
MALAWI'S SEX LAWS ON THE BASIS OF BEING DISCRIMINATORY.**

**Preamble**

Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living with of Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (MANERELA+), is an interfaith registered organisation in Malawi that was birthed to advocate, engage and fight against any form of faith driven stigma, discrimination, Inertia Mis-action in the context of HIV and its related vices. The organization emerged from a backdrop of the lack of action from faith at the epic point of HIV and AIDS, where discrimination was the key driver, embedded in the messaging and lack of encouragement and hopelessness that was directed at people living with or personally affected by the HIV and AIDS. MANERELA+ was born to act as a catalyst for creation of a conducive environment through identification and engagement of faith leaders who could champion the reversal of the then prevailing situation.

**Our Position**

As a faith-based organisation, we believe and assert that no faith be it Islam, Christian, Hinduism, Buddhism and others would be at the centre of sowing seeds of or driving discrimination of any kind. We further believe that the Laws of Malawi (the Constitution) outlaws and forms of discrimination; as outlined in Chapter IV Section 20. We believe in telling the truth, that unfortunately seems has been skewed in the recent statements by faith community (Mother Bodies). We further believe that the case currently at the Constitutional Court is in consonance with the Laws of Malawi; Chapter IV: 15:1 as the people who have taken the matter for interpretation from the court are acting within their rights under the Law.

Within the faith language we do further affirm the "Imago Dei" (Image of God), in every person created by God, LGBTIQ inclusive (Genesis 1:26-28). In our view faith must facilitate the realization of the "flourishing of the integral human good" than being judgmental and driving others (who are equally created in the image of God), into the peripheral. Faith must not gag the courts or endeavour to influence them as indicated in the Constitution Chapter IV: 15:2. Doing so publicly or otherwise must be construed as violation of the constitution.

## Our Concern

We, are among others concerned by the following attempts to misinform the general public:

1. That the case in the constitutional court is about allowing same sex marriage. Our view is the people who have taken the case to court are seeking an affirmation of their God given rights to exist as everyone else is, than being labelled, maimed, vilified, discriminated or judged as non-humans under the prevailing laws of the land.
2. That once the case is successful, then LGBTIQ persons will be spread all over and busy recruiting children and others to join the community. Our view is this is very untrue as even where laws recognizing and affirming LGBTIQ persons exist, no such a thing happens. Truth be said, God created us humans in a diverse manner and others remain a mystery to many.
3. That same sex relations are unnatural, uncultural and unbiblical. We believe these are scapegoats used to perpetuate stigma and discrimination towards a certain community of persons, instead of working or investing our energies in addressing certain vices currently prevalent in our society. The LGBTIQ community in Malawi continue to suffer from; extortion, violence (physical and verbal or digital), arrests and even displacement of bonafide citizens and the people created in God's image. Culture and religion or faith are both dynamic and progressive. The faith community has failed to demonise many vices that impede social economic development of our country, that affect our day-to-day life; i.e., Corruption, disease, poverty, hunger, murders and many others (even in some cases the community of faith has been complicit by being a beneficiary of such vices). One wonders how EVIL is ones claim to being recognized as PERSON in their sexual orientation and gender identity would be very EVIL to attract such a backlash of faith. Isn't this hypocrisy of a greater sense. Which faith or church would claim to be commissioned to dehumanize others?
4. That if the constitutional court grants the wishes of the two applicants, then everyone, including faith clerics will be forced to marry such persons. We believe, the question before the courts is not about marriage but rather an affirmation of the humanness of a human being created in the Image of God and a Citizen of Malawi, within the tenets of the Law. One wonders where the faith leaders are taking this assertion. We are aware that in other countries or parts where this recognition is there, no such compelling is prevalent.

In essence it would appear that the bulk of assertions from the recent and past statements are hugely skewed and misinforming people. They even misinformed people about the dates of the case. One wonders why we as faith leaders would want to be parading such misinformation.

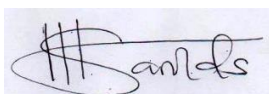
## Our Call

1. That the faith community must leave the Constitutional Court to interpret the law, without undue influence or pressure.
2. That the faith community must be “life affirming” than driving people to the margins and vulnerability. One wonders whether the churches have done enough soul searching on the impact pushing people on the margins. The impact these have on the levels of mental health, suicide and HIV infection among others must be adequately interrogated. The church and faith communities don’t want to be responsible for the escalation of such.
3. That the Constitutional Court will be directed to mete justice under Chapter IV Section 15 Sub-section 2, Section 20 of our own constitution and UDHR and other international instruments. In all aspects the courts are stand to deliver justice without discrimination.

## Our Conclusion

It is important that we underscore the need to be humane and respect human beings as diverse as we are. It is our hope that the Churches that have lately been vocal about the case in question will see the need to affirm human existence beyond being apologetics or biased towards some unknown interests. Malawi is a secular society with majority believers but that doesn’t box everyone into the wishes of the churches- “the church must stay away from being a museum of saints”, busy condemning people to oblivion but rather that community that provides a safe home for the down trodden and marginalized. To quote Jesus Christ; the church must profess “I have come to Give Life and Life to the FULLEST” (John 10:10). Under the current situation our compelling question must be “what would Jesus Do” let the churches seek to Imitate Jesus the author of the faith we bear than assuming His position.

We implore the churches to direct these efforts in many other areas that can develop the totality of the human family and Malawi in particular from myriad of challenges facing our society while affirming the diversity of creation. We remind the church to always preach PEACE and LOVE all the time because all human beings were created in the image of God.



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