



MALAWI NETWORK OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS LIVING WITH OR PERSONALLY AFFECTED BY HIV/AIDS

STATEMENT ON THE FAITH COMMUNITY DEMONSTRATION AGAINST LGBTIQ+ IN MALAWI AND ITS CALL TO CRIMINALIZATION OF SAME SEX RELATIONS

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 continues to exist to act as a conscious of faith or matters of ethics on contentious matters like the current vitriol against LGBTIQ+ plus community in the context of the court case on the population. MANERELA+ being a critical eye to faith engagement wishes to underline the role of faith in the midst of acrimony, dehumanization and its stance with the marginalized.

Our Position

While the faith community is acting within the parameters of the law of the land, it is disheartening that, the community called to be merciful, tender, slow to anger and compassionate has now turned against its own mission of being with and for the voiceless and downtrodden.

We find it both spiritually, morally and culturally troubling that the faith communities are currently leading an excessive and virulent hate and anger against minority population of Malawians, who do not (and may not) sexually orient nor socially identify as heterosexuals. We find the moral language used, the emotions generated, the psychic aggression and spiritual violence generated against the community unreligious, uncultured and immoral. There are big societal dangers that come with encouragement of the politics of sexual identity to override our personal and collective calling and spirit of LOVE and GRACE. It is not correct to continue glossing over our own spiritual shortcomings, our moral gaps and our pastoral care failings towards those we unfairly stigmatize and self-righteously ridicule time and again without a deep reflection on how our own individual and collective actions or inactions could have contributed to their unique 'being' and 'experience'.

We join the voices of eminent persons including the recent pronouncement from Pope Francis to the Catholic Bishops, as recent as on January, 24th, 2023 that cultural drive shouldn't be a reason for making people criminals for being who they are. He further reiterated for the need for

Bishops to undergo a process of change to recognize the dignity of everyone. “These bishops have to have a process of conversion., adding that they should apply “tenderness, as God has, for each one of us”.

Our Concern

While appreciating that the faith community acts as a moral compass of society, such and act must not degenerate into a drive that marginalizes the very people it has to stand with in its call and mandate. The current spate of demonstrations led by the faith leaders are not only worrying but raises huge concerns as regards to what the consequences would be on the affected population. Do we seriously consider our role in their circumstances? Would the faith community in Malawi ever want to be a party of Laws that makes others less humans because of their sexuality? To our Christian brothers and sisters, What Would Jesus Do or say in the current circumstances. As parents, brothers, sister’s nieces and uncles and aunties, grandparents can we imagine what we are vouching for our own people. The challenge in our environment is a lack of imagination and vision in seeing the treatment we are currently championing to affect us in one way or the other. These matters affect fellow Malawians that are close to us or a part of us as a people.

We are among others concerned by the following:

1. That the case faith community in its law-abiding approach joined the current court case at its own volition and seemingly is impatient to await the verdict of the Constitutional court. The current demonstrations subject the court to submit to pressure driven by the faith community, instead of being obedient to the Laws of the land.
2. The demonstration and their messages seem to inflame people who might take the law into their own hands and do more harm to a population that is already in the peripheral, through violence of various forms and extortion among others.
3. That the faith community seemingly wants to gag the courts through a public court in a matter that would require justice and fairness for a population that is in minority.
4. The faith community seemingly is failing its role of being a habitat for the “sinner” by professing a “holier than thou” attitude.
5. The faith community is seemingly misdirecting its energy towards a minority challenge as opposed to the myriad of challenges facing the Malawian population in general.
6. The faith community should invest into seeking God’s guidance in realizing the ‘MYSTERY’ of Gods DIVERSE creation and endeavouring to protect every human person.
7. 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.
8. We further find the suggestions of a referendum regarding a subject that is very divisive unwarranted. The battlefield seems to be drawn with the level of hype and misinformation that has polluted the minds of the general public will make it very

unequitable for the advocates to advance the subject. Besides issues of minority populations cannot be subjected to a popular view in an already polarized environment.

Our Call

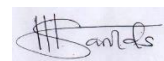
1. The faith community must endeavour to be what Saint Francis of Assisi confessed and prayed for in times like this instead of leading the pack in inflicting pain to the afflicted.
2. That the faith community must leave the constitutional court to interpret the law, without undue influence or pressure.
3. That the faith community must be life affirming than driving people to the margins and vulnerability. One wonders whether the 'Community of faith' 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 faith communities don't want to be responsible for such.
4. That the Constitutional Court will be directed by its role 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.
5. We want to reiterate that Malawi is a secular state governed under the republican constitution that embodies the aspirations of "We the People". To that effect, let the rule of law be exercised without necessarily gagging the courts to toe a certain line of thought advanced by a section of society

Our Conclusion

Once again, we must as a community faith remain the carriers of hope in a hopeless situation, love among those less or not loved by the world and a vessel of grace to those who seem to be alienated and domiciled in the peripheral. The church should not support attempts to make humans less humans for not being like others. Faith must endeavour to preach love in diversity for such is what we were created to be. Conformity can be traced back in the history of the faith community to being problematic, hence the need to being the proactive protector of those who are looked at as failures by society. The faith community cannot afford to stand aloof at the suffering of a section of society, neither can it be part of those perpetuating injury towards such a population. The faith community must endeavour to protect itself from playing a populist agenda in the eyes of the world. 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. In the sight of God/Allah the creator, we are all IMAGO DEI (image of God).



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