Malawi

The present report is a summary of 8 stakeholders’ submissions to the universal periodic review. It follows the structure of the general guidelines adopted by the Human Rights Council. It does not contain any opinions, views or suggestions on the part of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), nor any judgement or determination in relation to specific claims. The information included herein has been systematically referenced in endnotes and, to the extent possible, the original texts have not been altered. Lack of information or focus on specific issues may be due to the absence of submissions by stakeholders regarding these particular issues. The full texts of all submissions received are available on the OHCHR website. The report has been prepared taking into consideration the four-year periodicity of the first cycle of the review.

* The present document was not edited before being sent to United Nations translation services.
I. Background and framework

A. Scope of international obligations

1. World Vision International (WVI) recommended that Malawi expedite the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It further recommended Malawi to ratify or accede to all core international human rights instruments and ensure prompt compliance, implementation and reporting requirements.2

B. Constitutional and legislative framework

2. The Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) was concerned that, while Malawi is a party to many international treaties, it had not incorporated them into domestic law through legislation thus rendering them not enforceable in the courts of law.3 However, JS3 added that, according to section 211 of the Constitution, only the Conventions which entered into force before 1994, form part of the law, which can be used in domestic courts and are binding, unless, after this date, a specific Act of Parliament to incorporate the provisions set out in the Conventions has been enacted.4

3. WVI recommended that Malawi ensure the swift adoption of the recommendations of the Constitutional Review process to establish the definition of the child in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.5

4. WVI recommended that Malawi undertake all necessary steps to harmonize existing legislation, including the Constitution, with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and expedite the adoption of the bills, with priority to those affecting children, namely the Child (Care, Protection and Justice) Bill, the National Registration Bill, the Deceased Estates (Wills, Inheritance and Protection) Bill, the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill, the Revised Penal Code Bill, the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Bill and Education Act Review.6

C. Policy measures

5. WVI reported that, in the absence of a Comprehensive National Action Plan for Children (NAPC), no one national body had clear authority to and could be accountable for all child-related issues. Therefore it recommended that Malawi finalize the NAPC to ensure that resources are allocated directly toward child rights programs rather than be integrated in other policies.7

6. WVI reported that Malawi had implemented the National Plan of Action for Orphans and other vulnerable children in order to improve access for them to education, health, nutrition, water sanitation, and birth registration. In addition an OVC Registration System was being implemented to identify and consider the situation of orphans and vulnerable children.8

7. WVI recommended that Malawi strengthen its data collection systems concerning children and ensure that the information collected contains up-to-date, disaggregated data by sex, age and geographical areas on a wide-range of vulnerable groups.9
8. JS3 recommended that Malawi initiate special police reform programs, to teach the police, undertake efforts to protect the right to dignity during arrest, examination, interrogation.\textsuperscript{10}

II. Promotion and protection of human rights on the ground

A. Cooperation with human rights mechanisms

Cooperation with treaty bodies

9. CHRR expressed concerns with Malawi’s huge backlog of state reports that have yet to be submitted to human rights treaty bodies.\textsuperscript{11}

B. Implementation of international human rights obligations

1. Equality and non-discrimination

10. Joint Submission 3 (JS3) stated that women had limited power and control over their sexual and reproductive health because of gender norms and unequal gender relations that are deeply embedded in a culture that promoted male dominance in sexual relations; and condoned male promiscuity and sexual exploitation of women through harmful cultural practices.\textsuperscript{12}

11. JS3 recommended that Malawi outlaw homophobia and publication of anti-gay propaganda and hate speech.\textsuperscript{13} CHRR further recommended that Malawi end incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{14}

12. The Centre for the Development of People (CDP) reported that the Malawi Government through the Ministry of Information and Civic Education issued a press release condemning homosexuality and organizations fighting for the rights of MSM (men having sex with men). This homophobia had also reportedly been propagated by the media which had demonized gay issues.\textsuperscript{15}

13. WVI reported that there was a lack of comprehensive data on disabilities as well as a lack of institutions for children with disabilities with none catering specifically for mental illness in children. Work still needed to be made to eliminate discrimination on grounds of disability as the cultural mindset to reject such children remained deep rooted and prevalent.\textsuperscript{16}

14. CDP reported that Sections 153 and 156 of the Criminal Code was applied for the first time in December 2009 to arrest two men, Monjeza and Chimbalanga two days after they conducted a traditional engagement ceremony in Blantyre. They were forced to undergo medical examinations to find evidence of sexual relations with males and they were subjected to psychiatric evaluation without their consent.\textsuperscript{17}

2. Right to life, liberty and security of the person

15. CHRR indicated that cases of torture and other forms of ill-treatment and use of excessive force against alleged criminals, especially in places of detention, were reportedly common and were widely reported in the media. However, the Constitution guaranteed the inviolability of human dignity and prohibited torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.\textsuperscript{18} CHRR expressed concerns at impunity enjoyed by police officers accused of committing these crimes. It added that, while some officers had faced administrative sanctions, very few, had been brought to justice.\textsuperscript{19} CHRR recommended that Malawi
develop and adopt measures to prevent, prosecute and punish acts of torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement agencies and promptly establish the Police Complaint Commission as provided in the Malawi Police Act.20

16. CHRR expressed concern at measures which were aimed at persecuting sex workers. There were widespread accusations of police officers forcing the workers to have sex with them to buy their freedom since prostitution was criminalized.21

17. CHRR expressed concern at the living conditions in prisons which remained poor despite the perennial calls by the Inspectorate of Prisons requesting the government to take immediate action.22 Joint submission 2 (JS2) indicated that the country’s largest prison, Zomba Central Prison, had an official capacity of 800 prisoners but was holding almost 2,300 inmates in April 2010.23 CHRR indicated that the Prisons Authorities explained that this situation was the result of an increase in the number of inmates due to rising crime rates and delays in prosecuting criminal cases in courts, lack of human and financial capacity, shortage of prisons and deteriorating infrastructure and equipment. CHRR added that the Prisons Bill and Legal Aid Bill could lead to the improvement of these conditions if passed by the National Assembly.24

18. WVI reported that, while the Penal Code (Amendment) Bill intended to enhance protection of children, especially the girl child, from sexual abuse, reported cases of sexual abuse and exploitation of women and children had continued to rise to unprecedented numbers posing challenges to the protection, well-being, survival and development of children. Inadequate financial, capital and human resources as well as a lack of trained counsellors hampered the implementation of this legislation.25

19. Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (GIEACPC) indicated that corporal punishment was lawful at home. Corporal punishment was prohibited as a sentence for crime and as a disciplinary measure in penal institutions, as well as in schools and in alternative care settings under article 19 of the Constitution. However, there has been no specific legislation on this issue and corporal punishment was reportedly widely used in schools. The Revised Penal Code Bill and the Child (Care, Protection and Justice) Bill would explicitly prohibit judicial and disciplinary corporal punishment and in 2009, the government had recommended that the Education Act be revised to include explicit prohibition. GIEACPC recommended that Malawi enact and implement legislation to ensure complete prohibition of corporal punishment.26

20. Joint submission 1 (JS 1) reported that children, mainly boys from nine years old from Malawi are recruited to work in agriculture in neighbouring countries and are economically exploited. JS1 added that legislation did not provide any provision for the criminalization and the prosecution of trafficking in boys and that the Penal Code only criminalized the abduction of girls under 16 years. As for the Trafficking Bill, it had not yet been approved by the Cabinet before its presentation to the Parliament for enactment.27 JS1 recommended Malawi to bridge the gap in the domestic legislation; to efficiently and duly investigate, prosecute and adjudicate trafficking, to provide adequate protection to victims; and to coordinate and cooperate with neighbouring countries to alleviate the factors of trafficking in human beings.28

21. WVI made reference to incidents of trafficking of young girls for sexual exploitation.29

3. Administration of justice and the rule of law

22. WVI indicated that the positive shift in focus of the reformatory institutions from punishment to reform and rehabilitation was undermined by sporadic funding, inadequately trained staff, and insufficient training materials.30
23. JS2 reported that the Constitution enshrined various provisions related to the right to challenge the lawfulness of one’s detention, the right to be released from detention with or without bail, the right to be promptly informed of the reason for detention, the right to consult confidentially with a legal practitioner of his or her choice, and, where the interests of justice so required, to be provided with the services of a legal practitioner by the state. JS2 noted that inadequate access to quality legal assistance is a chronic and pervasive problem for criminal defendants notably due to a lack of lawyers and the overuse and frequent arbitrariness of pretrial detention. Pretrial detainees comprised almost a quarter (22 percent) of the prison population in Malawi in March 2010.

24. JS2 recalled that Malawi had recognized that, where a State has limited human and financial resources with which to address the rights of pretrial detainees, civil society organizations may play a key role in the protection of those rights, as notably underlined in the Lilongwe Declaration on Accessing Legal Aid in the Criminal Justice System in Africa. However, although the work of paralegals was increasingly being recognized by the police, courts and legal profession, their legal position and status in Malawi remained precarious. Because their role in the criminal justice system was not defined or regulated by law, it was essentially an informal one.

25. JS2 recommended that Malawi promulgate the Legal Education and Legal Practitioners Amendment Bill, which makes provision for paralegal services and seeks to formalize the role of paralegals and to promulgate the Legal Aid Bill which seeks to empower the Legal Aid Department to contract out some of its services to civil society based paralegals. JS2 also recommended that Malawi take additional steps to address the inadequacy of legal aid services for indigent criminal defendants, including by increasing the numbers of lawyers on the staff of the Legal Aid Department.

4. Right to privacy, marriage and family life

26. CHRR expressed concerns at the recently adopted Police Act, which gave police powers to conduct searches without obtaining a search warrant, although the right to privacy is guaranteed in the Constitution. CHRR recommended that Malawi consider reforms to this Act in order to ensure consistency with international practices of policing.

27. WVI indicated that there existed no minimum age for marriage and that the State only had the capability to discourage rather than forbid a marriage, which explained occurrences of forced and early marriages.

28. WVI reported that, once enacted, the National Registration Bill should make the registration of all births, deaths and marriages mandatory and make provision for identity cards for Malawians aged 16 years and above and resident foreigners.

29. JS3 indicated that the lack of appreciation of the subject and the strong religious and cultural background, within which human rights were accepted in the country, explains present hostility and resentment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people.

30. CDP underlined that provisions of the Criminal Code criminalizing same-sex activities violated the Constitution, which guaranteed the right to liberty, dignity, and security, prohibited discrimination on all grounds and protected the right to privacy, as well as provision of the African Charter on Human Rights and People’s Rights. JS3 added that “sex against the order of nature”; as enshrined in section 153 of the Penal Code, was interpreted to cover homosexual activity and some heterosexual activities.

31. JS3 recommended that Malawi repeal provisions of the penal code which criminalize same sex relationships / homosexuality. CHRR also recommended that Malawi review its legislation, which results in the discrimination, prosecution and
punishment of people solely for their sexual orientation or gender identity and immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners who are held solely on these grounds.45

32. The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network reported that Malawian courts interpreted the Married Women Property Act, 1882 in such a way that women are deprived of marital property upon marriage dissolution, as women’s non-financial contributions are not valued, thus legitimizing gender inequality.46

5. Freedom of religion or belief, expression, association and peaceful assembly and right to participate in public and political life

33. CHRR expressed concern about the increasing restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly in an attempt to stifle voices critical of the Head of State and the government. Over the past three years, this led to the arrest, ill-treatment and harassment of supporters of the opposition and human rights defenders and provided examples of this trend.47 CHRR reported that several planned peaceful demonstrations organised by those viewed to oppose government policies had been banned. Also the law required that organisers of a demonstration inform the police of their planned demonstration 48 hours before the actual demonstration. However, the prevailing practice was that the police did not respond to such requests with the intent of declaring any demonstrations which may take place as illegal.48

34. CHRR reported that media houses had become a regular target of harassment by Government and ruling party officials. On the other hand, public broadcasters in Malawi Broadcasting Cooperation (MBC) and Television Malawi (TVM) have for a long time reportedly been criticised for their editorial policy which usually favour the political parties in power.49 CHHR also reported on the new legislation on access to information to be adopted, which will restrict this right to journalists.50 CHRR recommended that Malawi adopt steps to ensure media independence from intimidation and suppression including through the enactment of the access to information bill.51

6. Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work

35. WVI reported that, although the Employment Act effectively eliminated all forms of forced labour, abolished child labour, established 14 years as the minimum age for employment and eliminated discrimination in respect of employment, concerns remained with respect to children working in the agricultural sector.52 WVI added that Malawi was working to prevent child labour through proposing the Child (Justice, Care and Protection) Bill as well as training monitoring committees and inspectors. However, the committees were challenged by inadequate resources, lack of cooperation from parents or guardians and those suspected to have employed children. Poverty among most people was the contributing factor towards an increase in economic exploitation of children.53

7. Right to social security and to an adequate standard of living

36. JSI reported that the lack of basic needs, including safe drinking water, accessible and affordable health care facilities and services, electricity and hygienic sanitation, perpetuated the decline in the standard of living, more particularly in rural areas.54

37. WVI reported that as a result of low family income food insecurity and high malnutrition existed and that the nutritional status of children in Malawi was not substantially improving.55

38. CHRR indicated that the Constitution of Malawi did not expressly provide for the right to health in its Bill of Rights but only regarded it as a principle of State priority.56 CHRR noted that Malawi had made progress in ensuring access to health services and progressively increasing resources to health. However, it remained concerned at the high
maternal mortality rate, which was in part attributed to shortage of staff and inadequate finances. In this regard, CHRR was concerned that government had failed to provide scholarship to nursing students forcing them to drop out of nursing schools. CHRR was also concerned that over two thirds of the Ministry of Health financial resources were allocated to secondary and tertiary care services, which disproportionately disadvantaged primary healthcare resulting in de facto discrimination against the majority of Malawians who live in rural areas.  

39. WVI indicated that the expenditure per capita on health was low and fell short of the amount estimated to deliver the Essential Health Package (EHP) which should be provided free of charge at all public health facilities within these circumstances.  

40. JS1 reported that HIV and AIDS exacerbated the number of orphans living in harsh living condition without suitable protection from the Government. The infected and affected persons, including children, had limited access to antiretroviral drugs and did not have a proper diet. Furthermore, the poor health care system worsened prevention and treatment opportunities, including the prevention from mother-to-child. JS1 added that the 2005-2009 National HIV and AIDS Action Framework and the 2006 Emergency Human Resources Strategy on health workers had not adequately addressed the effective implementation and coordination of a comprehensive response. JS1 recommended that Malawi expand available and accessible free antiretroviral treatment services, including in rural and remote areas.  

41. WVI reported that, amongst adolescents, prevention and education on HIV/AIDS were improving. However, women in this age range were four times more likely to contract the disease. A very high number of new HIV infections in Malawi every year have been attributed to mother to child transmission.  

42. CANHIVAIDS-LN indicated that, while Malawi should be commended for its commitment in the HIV Bill to prevent HIV-related discrimination and to provide free HIV medication, there were fundamental flaws in the HIV Bill that may limit its effectiveness and result in human rights violations. CANHIVAIDS-LN made recommendations regarding the conditions of disclosure of information.  

43. CANHIVAIDS-LN also reported that the HIV Bill provided for the protection of the right of HIV-positive people to privacy and confidentiality with regard to health information, but permitted a health service provider to disclose one’s HIV status under specific circumstances. CANHIVAIDS-LN recommended that the exceptions to forced testing be removed from the HIV Bill.  

44. CANHIVAIDS-LN indicated that articles 43, 44 and 45 of the HIV Bill criminalize exposure to, or transmission of, HIV. CANHIVAIDS-LN was of the opinion that, while the criminal law provisions in the HIV Bill may had been driven by a well-intentioned wish to protect women and to respond to serious concerns about the ongoing rapid spread of HIV in Malawi, applying criminal law to HIV exposure or transmission did nothing to address the epidemic of gender-based violence or the deep economic, social, and political inequalities that were at the root of women’s and girls’ disproportionate vulnerability to HIV. CANHIVAIDS-LN recommended Malawi to remove the provisions in the HIV Bill which broadly criminalize exposure to, or transmission of, HIV.  

45. JS1 recommended that Malawi finalize without delay the HIV/AIDS Bill, and ensure effective participation of all stakeholders, including civil society organisations, to
provide stronger protection, care and human rights of people living and affected by HIV and AIDS.70

47. CDP reported that a 2008 study revealed that men having sex with men (MSM) are a high-risk group for HIV infection and human rights abuses, a fact that the Malawian government reportedly acknowledged and had sought to integrate into its HIV/AIDS response.71 CPD believed that the arrest and trial of Monjeza and Chimbalanga has had a detrimental effect on HIV/AIDS outreach and education in the vulnerable MSM population. CDP also underlined that the National HIV/AIDS Policy called for the establishment of mechanisms to ensure that HIV/AIDS/STI prevention, treatment, care and support and impact mitigation services can be accessed by all without discrimination, including persons engaged in same sex sexual relations. In addition, the 2009-2013 Malawi National Prevention Strategy had included MSM as one of the target groups to be reached with prevention programmes. However, CDP reported that Malawi’s inclusions of MSM indicators in UNGASS report did not reflect the realities on the ground and that there was more to be done for MSM to have access to health care and HIV related information.72 JS3 underlined that, however, there was a code of silence in policy and law in relation to the protection of people in same sex relationships, since it is illegal and should not be promoted in one way or the other.73

48. JS1 indicated that extreme poverty was worsened by the widespread HIV and AIDS, which was lowering the life expectancy of the population.74

8. Right to education

49. JS1 reported that free primary education was introduced in 1994 but had not yet been made compulsory. It also indicated that primary education was affected by demographic pressure, a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, striking poverty, and very low human and social development.75 JS1 recommended that Malawi make primary education compulsory; include human rights and children’s rights in school curricula, and promote and strengthen vocational education and training opportunities to mitigate the high dropout effects.76

50. JS1 reported that the high dropout rate, particularly among the rural poor, was principally caused by poverty. The negative attitudes of certain communities towards education and the long distances covered by children to get to schools; the lack of child-friendly learning environments and the low budget allocation for education were other factors to be considered. JS1 also mentioned the very high Pupil:Teacher Ratio and indicated that the proposals included in the 2008-2017 National Education Sector Plan and the 2009-2013 Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP) were not based on any sound needs assessment or enrolment projections.77

51. JS1 reported that there were more or less equal numbers of boys and girls in each grade of primary school up to Standard 5. Girls tended to drop out of school at the top end of primary school in larger numbers than boys and the disparity increased in each successive grade. JS1 urged Malawi to prioritize measures and programmes designed in the ESIP to promote the promotion and retention of girls in school and to address gender equity issues amongst teachers and local communities.78 JS1 added that schooling inequalities arising from socioeconomic factors were partly a result of an unequal appropriation of public resources for education and recommended that Malawi ensure that all sectors of the community, (poor, girls and children with disabilities) have equal opportunities in education.79

52. JS1 reported that quality of education was poor and deteriorating with very poor results in reading and mathematics during public examinations in 2004. This decline had, in part, been attributed to the 1994 Fee-Free primary policy, which was not adequately
planned for. There was a severe shortage of teachers, which was compounded by a fairly
incoherent teacher deployment system as well as a big shortage of teaching and learning
materials in schools. 80 JS1 recommend that Malawi improve the quality of education
through improvement of the ratio of teachers to students and through well-trained, fully
qualified and well paid teachers. 81

53. JS1 reported that the internal efficiency of the education system was weak, largely
due to very high repetition rates, notably in standards 1 to 4 of the primary cycle. In
addition, there was no systematic teacher evaluation. JS1 recommended that Malawi
strengthen the monitoring and evaluation systems within the Ministry of Education,
including teacher evaluation. 82

9. Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers

54. WVI indicated that there were no Constitutional provisions on refugee children nor
was there data on the subject. 83

III. Achievements, best practices, challenges and constraints

55. JS1 indicated that, due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic that left many orphan
children, and that many households are headed by grandparents and very young children.
These young children, mainly girls, failed to continue their studies and the situation led to
the high rate of dropout of young girls without any adequate protection and support from
the Government. 84

IV. Key national priorities, initiatives and commitments

N/A

V. Capacity-building and technical assistance

56. With regard to education, JS1 recommended that Malawi give priority to
infrastructure development and request, if necessary, technical and financial assistance
from international organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF and increase the level of
education financing. 85
Notes

1 The stakeholders listed below have contributed information for this summary; the full texts of all original submissions are available at: www.ohchr.org. (One asterisk denotes a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.)

Civil society

CDP Centre for the Development of People, Malawi;
CHRR Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation, Lilongwe, Malawi;
CANHIV/AIDS-LN Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network*, Toronto, Canada;
GIEACPC Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, London, United Kingdom;
JS1 Franciscans International*; Centre for Social Concern, Missionaries of Africa; Foundation for Marist International Solidarity; Pax Romana*, Geneva, Switzerland, joint submission;
JS2 Open Society Justice Initiative; Paralegal Advisory Service Institute, New York, United States, joint submission;
JS3 The Women’s Crisis Centre; Sexual Rights Initiative, Malawi, joint submission;

2 WVI, p. 5.
3 CHRR, p. 3.
4 JS3, para. 2.
5 WVI, p. 5.
6 WVI, p. 4.
7 WVI, p. 5.
8 WVI, p. 3.
9 WVI, p. 4.
10 JS3, para. 27.
11 CHRR, p. 3.
12 JS3, para. 11.
13 JS3, para. 17.
14 CHRR, p. 7.
15 CDP, p. 2.
16 WVI, p. 3.
17 CDP, p. 1; see also CHRR, p. 6; JS3, paras. 13-15.
18 CHRR, p. 4.
19 CHRR, p. 4.
20 CHRR, p. 7.
21 CHRR, p. 6.
22 CHRR, p. 4.
23 JS2, para. 9.
24 CHRR, p. 4-5.
25 JS3, p. 4.
27 JS1, paras. 1-3.
28 JS1, para. 4.
29 WVI, p. 3.
30 WVI, p. 3.
31 JS2, para. 5.
32 JS2, paras. 6-7.
33 JS2, paras. 10-13.
34 JS2, para. 17.
35 JS2, para. 18.
36 JS2, para. 19.
37 CHRR, p. 4.
38 CHRR, p. 7.
39 WVI, p. 3.
40 WVI, p. 4.
41 JS3, para. 4.
42 CDP, p. 1.
43 JS3, para. 9.
44 JS3, para. 21.
45 CHRR, p. 7.
46 CANHIV/AIDS-LN, paras. 3-5.
47 CHRR, p. 5-6.
48 CHRR, p. 5.
49 CHHR, p. 3.
50 CHRR, p. 3.
51 CHRR, p. 7.
53 WVI, p. 2.
54 JS1, para. 9; see also WVI, p. 2.
55 WVI, p. 2.
56 CHRR, p. 6.
57 WVI, p. 6.
58 WVI, p. 2.
59 JS1, paras. 5-6.
60 JS1, para. 7.
61 JS1, para. 8.
62 WVI, p. 2.
63 CANHIV/AIDS-LN, para. 10.
64 CANHIV/AIDS-LN, para. 12.
67 CANHIV/AIDS-LN, para. 15.
68 CANHIV/AIDS-LN, paras. 16-18.
69 CANHIV/AIDS-LN, para. 18.
70 JS1, para. 8.
72 CDP, p. 3.
73 JS3, para. 10.
74 JS1, para. 10; see also WVI, p. 2.
75 JS1, paras. 14-15; see also WVI, p. 1.
76 JS1, para. 17.
77 JS1, paras. 18-23.
78 JS1, para. 26.
79 JS1, paras. 27-28.
80 JS1, paras. 29-35.
81 JS1, para. 36.
82 JS1, paras. 37-40.
83 WVI, p. 4.
84 JS1, para. 5.
85 JS1, para. 24.