PROTECTING OUR CIVIC SPACE: WE WON'T YIELD TO IMPUNITY!

In the face of ever-growing intimidation, The Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC) promises to remain stubborn against such vices as impunity and corruption. In keeping with our promise, no amount of threats, arrests, mudslinging and any such gimmick by regime thugs aimed suffocating our accountability calls and tampering with a civic sanctuary ever drive us into submission and toe the line of the oppressor.

The past few weeks have been as eventful and trying times on our resolve as HRDC. HRDC has systematically been targeted by regime agents. We take this opportunity to comment on a number of issues;

1. **Arbitrary arrests of comrade Gift Trapence and Rev MacDonald Sembereka**

   Without prejudice to the court due processes, we at HRDC condemn in strongest terms the arbitrary arrest of our Vice-Chairperson Mr Gift Trapence and Senior comrade Rev Macdonald Sembereka. We strongly believe that the arrest do not have merit whatsoever but are aimed at silencing the HRDC and any regime critics.

   The state does not have evidence nor witnesses to support their case. The current regime is not even ashamed of abusing the criminal justice system to threaten those of us who are demanding accountability.
We contend that the timing of these arrests tells a tale of a threatened, clueless and coward government; a government that do not have stamina to face its challenges and provide sober leadership to the woes that Malawi is facing.

Our resolve to accountability is unshaken! They can arrest us all but the noble cause we are fighting does will not go with us to jail. The people themselves will continue to manifest our call to accountability.

2. The Shrinking Civic Space
We are also very alive to the cheap and tired gimmicks that the state in employing to shrink the civic space. The arbitrary arrests of our leadership and Malawians that peacefully took part in our recent demonstrations, the threats to our lives and property, threat to deregister our respective institutions are all but clear attempts to wipe out the civic space.

They have accused us of inciting violence. HRDC is an organization that propagates peace and we have been preaching peace throughout. We maintain that all our interventions have been peaceful. We thank all those that peacefully patronized our demonstrations and observed restraint amidst provocation.

While we do not condone any kind of violence, we take this opportunity to remind all relevant stakeholders that pockets of alleged violence, looting and vandalism that characterized the demonstrations in some selected areas must not be used as an excuse to suspend our rights to assembly and participation.

3. Jane Ansah must go! It’s not about gender.
We are dismayed with some futile attempts by regime sympathizers to play the gender card at our calls for Jane Ansah to resign or be fired. We have repeatedly indicated that our call for the Malawi Electoral Commission to resign has nothing to do with her being a woman. We are not timid to say that our call for accountably is and will always be gender blind and insensitive.
We observe with utter shock that those throwing in the gender card have shamelessly chosen to mislead the masses and are deliberately blind to Malawi Electoral Commission history. We take the trouble to remind them that we have had a woman MEC chairperson in Chief Justice Anastasia Msosa, retired, who twice diligently delivered a relatively free, fair and credible elections and no one called for her head. On the hand, we had Justice Hanjahanja during the 1999 General Elections who honorably resigned following many complaints from various diverse groups in Malawi.

**Our next steps.**

As promised in our earlier communication, the HRDC hereby announce countrywide demonstrations demanding the firing or resignation of Dr. Jane Ansah as the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission. We will be calling the appointing authority to exercise his prerogative and relieve Dr Jane Ansah and her entire commission of their duties for betraying electorate during the 21st May 2019 tripartite elections. The demonstrations will be on 16 and 19 of July 2019. Should you refuse to resign we will continue with demonstration across the country every Tuesdays and Friday of every week.

**Our Immediate Call.**

In the meantime, have the following calls to make

1. Immediate release of our comrades Gift Trapence and Rev MacDonald Sembereka
2. Regime thugs to stop threatening comrades within HRDC.
3. The President Peter Mutharika must fire Dr. Jane Ansa as the MEC Chairperson

We would like to once again remind all Malawians that our primary focus is to restore Malawi’s Destiny through electoral justice. We want Jane Ansa to resign.

We will not relent until we meet our objective. Each one of us has a responsibility to fix our Malawi, our mother land.

Once again, we thank Malawians for coming out in large numbers. This is a process for Malawians, it’s not political and therefore it should be owned by Malawians.
LONG LIVE MALAWIAN DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT!

Signed by

Timothy Mtambo 
**HRDC Chairperson**

Gift Trapence 
**HRDC Vice Chairperson**

Happy Mhango – Chair North

Madalitso Banda – Chair East

Masauko Thawe – Chair South

Billy Mayaya – Chair Centre

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