

PRESS RELEASE

THE MALAWI LEGAL AID BUREAU

ACCESS TO JUSTICE REJUVENATED? – SIX YEARS ON

The Malawi Legal Aid Bureau was established under **Section 3** of the Legal Aid Act, Cap. 4:01 of the Laws of Malawi to provide legal aid to persons of insufficient means. The Bureau provides legal aid through the provision of legal advisory and assistance services, legal representation in both civil and criminal matters as well as legal literacy services.

On 15th March, 2021, the Malawi Legal Aid Bureau clocked **six years** since it started its operations with the mandate to redefine the legal aid scheme across Malawi.

Since March, 2015, the Bureau set out to restructure, remodel and roll out the new legal aid scheme for the country as prescribed under the Legal Aid Act of 2010. The Bureau has significantly grown its operational structure to ensure that as many Malawians as possible have access to the ever elusive justice. The highlights include the following;

- a. **Remodelled and restructured** the **Blantyre, Lilongwe** and **Mzuzu** offices into semi-autonomous regional offices to administer legal aid services and provide oversight to district offices in respective regions.
- b. Opening of **Zomba** office as the eastern regional office as the last justice administration region to have a regional office. Further, the Bureau has embarked on rolling out legal aid services to the districts by opening district legal aid offices. So far the Bureau has opened thirteen (13) district legal offices in **Nsanje, Mwanza, and Mulanje** (south), **Mangochi, Machinga** (east), **Dedza, Salima, Mchinji, Nkhota Kota, and Kasungu** (center), **Chitipa, Mzimba** and **Karonga** (north). The district offices are one way of ensuring access to justice at the local level by reducing the time and effort the public has to invest to access justice in the country. The Bureau plans to open all district offices by 2024.
- c. Formulated and launched the **Bureau's Strategic Plan** which remains the guiding tool for the executing of the Bureau's mandate from 2017 to 2023.
- d. The Bureau has also embarked on serious recruitment drive for both technical and administrative staff. The staff complement for the Bureau has grown from **32** employees in **2015** to **124** in **March 2021** and more critically the number of lawyers has risen from **6 lawyers** in **2015** to **25 lawyers** in **2021**. Of interest is that the Bureau is in tune with the Gender Equality Act with over **42%** of its staff being women. The target is to have **50%** women representation at all levels by 2025.
- e. The increased access to legal aid service has resulted in the Bureau recording over **30,000 cases** and closed about **14,000 cases** and having about **16,000 active** cases since 2015 to date. This high number of requests of cases is a testament of the need for effective legal aid scheme and the trust the public has on the abilities of the Bureau. This situation conversely demonstrates a clear strain on the human and financial resources the Bureau has at its disposal.
- f. The Bureau has also coordinated with various stakeholders to take advantage of comparative skills and enhance provision of legal aid to the masses. These include the Paralegal Advisory Services Institute (PASI), the Malawi Law Society (MLS), Center for

Human Rights, Education, Advice and Assistance (CHREAA), Palliative Care Association of Malawi (PACAM), Center for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR), Women Judges Association of Malawi (WOJAM), Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), Byounique Trust. Through these partners, legal has been extended to over **3,000** additional people.

- g. For the first time in the country, the Bureau has embarked on a serious public legal literacy campaign. The Bureau has undertaken public awareness campaigns reaching out to an estimated **35,000 people**, television and radio programmes with viewership and listenership of over **3 million people**. The Bureau is currently finalising working arrangements with the Malawi Broadcasting Cooperation (MBC) and Times Group for more public legal education programmes.

The Director, Management and staff of the Malawi Legal Aid Bureau would like to sincerely thank the Malawi Government and the European Union for their significant assistance provided to the Bureau to set up its operations and general support to the provision of legal aid services across the country.



Masauko Edwin Chamkakala, Esq.

Director – Malawi Legal Aid Bureau