

## Mai Aisha Trust Clinches Recognition as Malawi's NGO with Highest Community Investment

By: Fareeda Muheya

In a remarkable achievement for the humanitarian sector, Mai Aisha Trust (MAT), an independent non-profit organization, has been crowned as a local NGO with highest community investment in Malawi at a ceremony held at Kamuzu palace in Lilongwe on 14 December, 2023.

The accolade not only highlights the organization's commitment to its mission but also recognizes the crucial impact it has had on rural communities across the country.

The award comes as a testament to Mai Aisha Trust's tireless efforts in the realm of relief and development, specifically through sustainable and participatory approaches aimed at empowering rural communities to improve their living conditions.

Abdulaziz Yasin, the Operations Manager at Mai Aisha Trust, expressed gratitude and excitement about the recognition saying the award shows that there is a good recognition between the organisation with its donors and communities.

"This award is a testament to the dedication and hard



Yasin (left) receiving the award from President Chakwera

work of our team, as well as the support we've received from donors and partners. It reaffirms our belief in the power of sustainable development and community involvement," he said.

Mai Aisha Trust has consistently demonstrated a commitment to addressing immediate relief needs while

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# 2025 Elections Alert:

## NAVIGATING THE POLITICAL STORM

### A CALL FOR VIGILANCE AMIDST GROWING CONCERNS



**A**s Malawi braces itself for the approaching 2025 elections, citizens must prepare for the inevitable surge of political campaigns that will inundate our daily lives. While elections are a cornerstone of democracy, it is essential for Malawians to approach this period with a critical eye, mindful of the tactics politicians may employ to garner support.

The upcoming campaign season is not only an opportunity for candidates to present their visions for the nation but also a time when the electorate must remain vigilant against manipulative strategies.

One of the most common and potentially misleading tactics employed by politicians is the use of extravagant promises. During the campaign season, aspirants often make grandiose pledges, promising

the moon and stars to win the hearts of voters.

While it is natural to be swayed by promises of prosperity and progress, it is important for citizens to assess the feasibility of these commitments.

Scrutinizing the track record of candidates and their parties can provide valuable insights into their ability to translate promises into tangible results.

Another strategy frequently employed is the art of populism. Politicians may attempt to tap into the emotions and sentiments of the public, presenting themselves as champions of the people.

While connecting with the electorate is essential, citizens must be cautious not to be swayed solely by charismatic speeches and emotional appeals.

Substance should take precedence over style, and citizens should demand concrete plans and policies rather than falling for empty rhetoric.

The 2025 election season may also witness an escalation of divisive tactics, with politicians attempting to exploit differences among the population for political gain. Malawians must be alert to the dangers of polarization and actively resist attempts to sow discord.

Unity and inclusivity should be prioritized, as a divided nation is less likely to address the challenges that lie ahead.

Furthermore, the use of misinformation and disinformation campaigns has become a global concern in recent years. As seen in 2019 and 2020 politicians used the Covid 19 as a tool to misinform citizens to gain popularity and favours for the presidential elections.

Candidates attempted to present themselves as saviours or vilify opponents based on their handling of the crisis. Such tactics not only undermine the public's trust but also risk jeopardizing the collective efforts to combat the pandemic.

Malawians should be discerning consumers of information, fact-checking claims made by candidates, and relying on credible sources to make informed decisions. Falsehoods have the potential to undermine the democratic process, and citizens must guard against the spread of misinformation.

Malawians have the power to shape the future of the nation, and this power comes with the responsibility to make informed choices. While politicians vie for our trust and votes, it is crucial to scrutinize their track records and hold them accountable for tangible results. By remaining vigilant, critically evaluating candidates and their proposals, and actively participating in the democratic process, this can lead to assurance that the 2025 elections contribute to the advancement of our beloved Malawi.



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## Mai Aisha Trust Clinches Recognition as Malawi's NGO with Highest Community Investment

simultaneously fostering long-term, positive change. The organization's approach, grounded in sustainability and active community participation, has resonated with donors and stakeholders alike.

"Our focus has always been on creating lasting impact. We believe that by empowering communities with the tools and knowledge they need, we can break the cycle of poverty. This award validates the effectiveness of our approach and motivates us to continue our work with even greater zeal," Yasin emphasized.

Mai Aisha Trust, established in 2002, stands as a beacon of hope and change in the realm of humanitarian efforts. As an independent, non-profit making organization, the Trust is dedicated to fostering relief and development in marginalized regions, with a specific focus on employing sustainable and participatory approaches.

At the core of Mai Aisha's mission lies the commitment to empowering rural communities, enabling them to enhance their living conditions and pave the way for a more promising future.

Adding to that Yasin said Sustainability is a cornerstone of Mai Aisha Trust's work. The organization recognizes that true empowerment involves equipping communities with



*Members of staff of Mai Aisha Trust displaying their products*

the tools and knowledge to break free from the cycle of poverty.

"This is achieved through projects that promote agriculture, environmental reservation, education, clean water provision, healthcare just to mention a few. By fostering self-reliance, Mai Aisha ensures that communities can thrive independently in the long run," said Yasin.

Yasin further emphasized that as an organization, they are obligated to submit reports to the government, which played a significant role in securing the prestigious award.

"It is our responsibility to provide comprehensive reports on our activities to the government. However, our organization operates on a policy that refrains from publicizing our work. We derive satisfaction from our actions as a means of fulfilling our

commitment to our faith rather than seeking community approval," he explained.

During the same event, while presiding over the ceremony, President Dr. Lazarus Chakwera urged NGOs in the country to align their programs with the Malawi 2063 Vision.

He emphasized the need for impactful initiatives that look towards the future, contrasting them with activities lacking vision and a meaningful mission in the present. He also underlined the importance of forward-thinking initiatives in the development landscape.

"Prominent programs should be those that project a positive impact in the future, rather than engaging in activities devoid of vision and a significant mission," Chakwera stated.

President Chakwera also called upon the Minister of Finance to implement proper regulations on the foreign exchange received by Non-Governmental Organizations operating in the country.

The request reflects the government's commitment to ensuring transparency and accountability in the financial transactions of NGOs, contributing to the overall effectiveness and impact of their initiatives in Malawi.



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Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Aharon Barak

# AHARON BARAK

## AND ISRAEL'S LEGAL ILLEGALITY

***Israel's ad-hoc judge at the ICJ genocide hearing has a long track record of circumventing international legal norms to prop up Israeli apartheid.***

**Dr Mazen Masri**

In a historic move, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) held its first hearing in the proceedings initiated by South Africa against Israel on January 11 and 12. The application, submitted on December 29, contended that Israel's conduct in the Gaza conflict amounted to genocide, thereby violating its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention

and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The Statute of the ICJ allowed state parties to appoint a judge ad-hoc if the state lacked a judge of its nationality in the case. Both South Africa and Israel chose to appoint their own judge ad-hoc, with South Africa selecting former Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke and Israel opting for its former Supreme Court President, Aharon Barak.

The decision to appoint Barak came as no surprise. The 87-year-old, who served as a judge for 28 years, 11 as the president of the Supreme Court, had a distinguished career as the attorney general of Israel from 1975 to 1978 and an esteemed academic history at the Hebrew University.

Known for his international reputation, prolific writing, and a reputation as a Western liberal jurist promoting the rule of law and human



rights in a challenging region, Barak's legacy had an added layer – that of a Holocaust survivor and a fearless human rights champion.

Barak presided as a judge in a case where South Africa contested the legality of Israel's actions in its brutal war against the Palestinians. The Supreme Court of Israel, under Barak's tenure, had been the final arbiter of the legality of Israeli practices since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. His appointment as judge ad-hoc provided an opportunity to scrutinize his and the court's record, examining how they shaped Israel's application of international law.

One of the thorniest issues Barak dealt with was the question of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Despite widespread consensus on the illegality of these settlements and a list of international law authorities, including UN resolutions and an ICJ opinion, the Supreme Court, under Barak's leadership, ruled in 1993 that settlements were "non-justiciable." This decision refused to discuss their legality under international law.

While the court aimed to temper some of the excesses of the settlement project to prevent chaos, the rules it set out served to legitimize the entire settlement endeavor. As a result, the settler population skyrocketed from a few thousand in 1975 to 700,000 in 2023.

A similar pattern emerged in cases related to the wall built by Israel in the West Bank. In 2004, the ICJ issued an advisory opinion declaring the wall illegal due to its violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people. However, Barak's court

provided the legal stamp of approval, legitimizing a project that significantly restricted Palestinian movement.

The Supreme Court, under Barak, continued to endorse the practice of punitive home demolition, a savage tactic used against the families of Palestinians suspected of resisting the occupation. Despite dissenting views, the court, under Barak's leadership, approved the practice, presenting it as an administrative measure intended to promote security through deterrence. While in a few cases the court deemed demolitions disproportionate, it never challenged the practice's manifest illegality under international law.

Another contentious issue was the use of torture, where Barak's court left the door open for "physical investigation means" in situations of a "ticking timebomb." Despite a marked decrease in reported cases initially, the backdoor introduced by Barak turned into a gateway, leading to a significant increase in torture cases against Palestinian political prisoners.

In the case of Mubarak Awad, a Palestinian activist, Barak's court dismissed Awad's legal challenge, providing a precedent used by the Israeli government to invalidate the Jerusalem resident status of thousands of Palestinians. This legal framework, treating the native Palestinian population as migrants, persists today, severely limiting Palestinians' ability to travel, seek education, and work abroad.

These examples, among others, illustrate Barak's approach to international law—ignoring it when it did not suit Israel's goals or applying a distorted version that created an

image of compliance with the rule of law and human rights while allowing wrongful practices to continue with some constraints.

For Palestinians, the consequences were dire, with increasing settlers and settlements, normalization of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners, homelessness for children and families due to demolished homes, and tens of thousands unable to return to Jerusalem, considered alien immigrants without resident status.

While some may argue that Barak's balancing approach was the best in the circumstances, the suffering of those on the receiving end of his rulings cannot be ignored. No legal analysis or political justification can hide or excuse the fact that, under Barak's watch, a sophisticated system of apartheid emerged, as documented by human rights organizations and UN special rapporteurs.

For a long time, Barak's approach and reputation shielded Israel from legal reckoning in international tribunals and courts. His appointment as judge ad-hoc to the ICJ became another iteration of his role as Israel's legal "bulletproof vest." With 16 other judges at The Hague, Barak faced the challenge of justifying his past stance, as he had seemingly made up his mind that the attacks of October 7 could be described as a genocide, but not Israeli attacks and practices, which Barak asserted were in line with international law.

***The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Insight Bulletin editorial stance.***

# Private Sector urged to promote human rights



*Chakwera appreciating delegates activities on human rights*

In a noteworthy development on the international stage, President Lazarus Chakwera has called upon the private sector to take an active stance in advancing human rights in Malawi.

The president's impassioned plea came to the forefront during the commemoration of International Human Rights Day at Chigumukire Primary School Ground in Chileka, Blantyre on 11 December 2023.

Highlighting the critical role that financial backing from the private sector could play, President Chakwera underscored the urgency of supporting the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) in addressing pressing human rights issues within the country.

This appeal reflects a concerted effort to foster collaboration between the government and the private sector for the greater cause of human rights advancement in Malawi.

"In acknowledging the Malawi Human Rights Commission's concerns regarding insufficient funding impeding their crucial work in addressing human rights issues, I emphasize the imperative of collaborative efforts. Together, we must unite to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights for all," President Lazarus Chakwera said.

He added that the private sector shares the responsibility of



addressing human rights concerns and urged them to support key governance institutions, including MHRC, the Legal Aid Bureau, and the Anti corruption Bureau (ACB).

“As we strive to promote and protect human rights, our government remains steadfast in its commitment. We are actively enhancing accountability and transparency by fortifying oversight bodies and strengthening public institutions, ensuring a resolute defense of human rights in our nation,” Chakwera explained.

He expressed delight in Malawi’s international recognition, citing recent re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council and maintaining a status as a top human rights adherent.

President Chakwera also emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for others, especially those with more disposable income, urging them to contribute to the support of education and human rights.

“In our pursuit of a just and equitable society, I advocate for a comprehensive review of legislations, including the Child Protection and Justice Act, Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, and Disability Act. Simultaneously, we stand committed to addressing the challenges posed by climate change, recognizing its potential to exacerbate human rights infringements,” Chakwera said.

Rebecca Adda-Dontoh, the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Malawi, commended the Chakwera

led administration for its strides in advancing justice and equality in the country.

She praised the president for creating an enabling environment for the protection of marginalized groups, including women, children, the elderly, and refugees.

Maggie Kathewera Banda, Executive Director of Women’s Legal Resources Centre (WOLREC), urged President Chakwera to facilitate the introduction and passage of new laws in Parliament to ensure fair representation of women in elected positions.

She also called for a review of the NGO Act to align it with Human Rights Principles.

“As a country there is a need

of outlining the importance of increased female representation in Parliament and local government structure, especially as the country approaches the 2025 elections,” Banda emphasized.

Inga Petursdottir, Head of Mission at the Embassy of Iceland, congratulated the Malawi government for its re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council. She appealed for concerted efforts among local and international communities to advance the promotion of human rights, peace, and justice.

The event, held under the theme ‘Freedom, Equality, and Justice for All,’ aimed to promote human rights and encourage collective action towards a more just and equal society.



*Chakwera interacting with delegates*

# MRA Stresses Role of Media in Taxation Issues



*MRA officials and journalist group photo*

**By: Aubrey Thom Vakhani**

In a two-day media training held between December 4 and 5, 2023, the Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA) reiterated the role of the media in disseminating information on taxation issues.

The training, organized by MRA in Mzuzu, aimed at enhancing the understanding of journalists regarding tax related matters.

MRA Manager for Corporate Affairs and Marketing Communications Wilma Chalulu highlighted the intricate nature of tax issues and commended the media for playing a crucial role in simplifying and

conveying this information to the general public.

Chalulu expressed satisfaction regarding MRA's partnership with the media, acknowledging the industry as instrumental in bridging information gaps related to taxation.

"The media fraternity is a very important conduit for disseminating information on tax and taxation issues, which are inherently complex. MRA believes that our partnership with the media plays a significant task in filtering and conveying information about taxation to the public," said Chalulu.

Chalulu reaffirmed MRA's

commitment to ongoing engagement with the media, recognizing that despite making progress, there are still gaps in public knowledge regarding taxation.

She emphasized the importance of feedback from the media in refining and enhancing MRA's communication strategies.

"As we proceed, there will still be gaps, and that's why we continue these interactions to assess public knowledge. The partnership with the media is essential for mutual feedback, ensuring that the public is well-informed about tax issues," Chalulu added.





*Chalulu addressing the media*

Addressing the effectiveness of MRA's initiatives, Chalulu shared the success story of Block Management System (BMS) introduced a few years ago.

The BMS designed to engage with small and medium enterprises outside the tax net, has proven to be successful in encouraging voluntary compliance.

"The Block Management System was created to bridge information gaps

and help taxpayers understand their obligations. Through interactions facilitated by the system, small and medium enterprises are voluntarily joining the tax net as they better comprehend their responsibilities," Chalulu explained.

During the training, journalists were equipped with insights into various topics, including Presumptive Tax, Block Management System, Exercise Tax Stamps, Corporate Affairs Mandate, Ethics and Integrity

in MRA, Msonkho Online, and Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) World Migration, and Customs Enforcement: Anti-Smuggling.

Ephraim Mkali Banda, a journalist from PL FM and a participant in the training, expressed appreciation for MRA's efforts in enhancing media practitioners' understanding of tax issues.

Banda urged fellow journalists to utilize the knowledge gained during the training for effective and accurate reporting on tax related matters.

"The Block Management System was created to bridge information gaps and help taxpayers understand their obligations. Through interactions facilitated by the system, small and medium enterprises are voluntarily joining the tax net as they better comprehend their responsibilities"



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*Part of Media team at TB orientation Meeting*

## TB, LEPROSY FIGHT GAINS MOMENTUM IN MALAWI

By Edward Rex

**T**he battle against Tuberculosis (TB) and Leprosy in Malawi has gained substantial momentum, with a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders partnering with the Ministry of Health to combat these ailments in the country.

The Department of Mining, Malawi Prison Services, Ministry of Labour, Partners in Hope, Development from People to People (DAPP), and Faith groupings are all working hand in hand with the National Tuberculosis and Leprosy Elimination Program to implement diverse strategies aimed at eradicating these diseases by 2030.

In a 2-day bi-meeting from 20 to 21 December 2023 on TB and Leprosy held in Zomba, attended by these key stakeholders, Chimwemwe Shaba, spokesperson for Malawi Prison Services, acknowledged the heightened threat of TB spread within the country's prisons due to congestion.

"Our nation's prisons, designed for 8,000 inmates, now bear the burden of 16,010 individuals. This unsettling truth not only challenges the limits of our correctional facilities but also presents a looming menace to the surge in TB prevalence rates," Shaba said.

Despite this challenge, Shaba outlined the efforts undertaken by the Prison Services department to address the diseases.

Measures include early diagnosis for prisoners and prompt medical treatment for those testing positive.

"Currently, 42 prisoners are undergoing TB treatment," stated Shaba.

Sinya Mtawali, an official from the Ministry of Labour, highlighted their ground-level efforts to prioritize health safety measures in all workplaces.

Their goal is to create a conducive environment that protects people from various diseases, including TB.

National TB and Leprosy Elimination Program officials noted the promising

developments in the fight against Tuberculosis in 2023.

"Financial challenges have posed limitations on some of our operations in connection with the fight against Tuberculosis. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge and express our gratitude to various stakeholders, with a special mention to the World Health Organization, for their unwavering support in overcoming these challenges and advancing our shared goal of eliminating TB," he said.

Dr. Mpunga also noted a significant increase in people seeking early diagnosis for TB, especially when compared to the period of COVID-19 when access to healthcare services for TB was limited.

Expressing optimism, he affirmed the program's commitment to achieving the 2030 target of eliminating TB in Malawi, with the support of the community and dedicated stakeholders.





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