



## PRESS RELEASE

### MALAWI LEGAL AID BUREAU CELEBRATES TEN (10) YEARS ANNIVERSARY – BRINGING JUSTICE CLOSER AND CLOSEST TO THE GRASSROOTS

The Director, Management and Staff of the Malawi Legal Aid Bureau (Bureau) are pleased to announce that the **15th of March 2025** marks **ten (10)** years of operations since its establishment as an independent institution from the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in 2015. The Bureau was established under the **Legal Aid Act** to provide legal aid services to persons who cannot afford private legal services in the country. The Bureau provides legal aid through legal advice, legal assistance, legal representation, and civic education and information about the law.

In the last **ten (10)** years, the Bureau has grown significantly in size and has taken significant strides toward ensuring access to justice for the indigent and the marginalized members of the public. Among other notable highlights:

1. The Bureau has expanded its operations from **three (3)** regional offices in 2015 to **four (4)** regional offices in Blantyre (South), Zomba (East), Lilongwe (Center), and Mzuzu (North) as well as **eighteen (18)** district legal aid offices in Nsanje, Mulanje, Mwanza, Thyolo (**south**), Mangochi, Machinga, Phalombe, Balaka (**east**), Nkhosakota, Mchinji, Salima, Dedza, Kasungu, Dowa, and Ntchisi (**center**), Karonga, Chitipa, and Mzimba (**north**). Currently, plans are underway to open additional district offices in the remaining districts during the coming financial year. Notably, the Bureau has already secured office space in Nkhatabay. This expansion drive aims at ensuring that the indigent and vulnerable persons access justice with less effort, cost and time.
2. The Bureau has undertaken massive recruitment exercises over the years, growing from a total of **31 employees** across Malawi in 2015 to **229 employees** in all departments across Malawi as of March 2025, thereby being able to handle a significantly increased volume of work. The current staff compliment includes **48 legal practitioners, 60 legal aid assistants/paralegals, and 121 support staff**. The Bureau is proud that **46%**

of its officers are female, hence being compliant with the **Gender Equality Act**.

3. The Bureau has, since **2019**, been implementing the **Pro Bono Scheme** in collaboration with the **Malawi Law Society**. Under this scheme, members of the general public who could otherwise not afford a private legal practitioner have the opportunity to access the services of a private legal practitioner at no extra cost. Additionally, in **2023**, the Bureau, together with the Malawi Law Society jointly launched a **Nationwide Pro Bono Legal Services Scheme** which ensures free legal service provision by members of the Malawi Law Society and takes the service further to local communities.
4. The Bureau has intensified its service provision to Malawians through awareness campaigns and prison visits which have offered the citizenry a platform for seeking legal aid with ease. The awareness campaigns spread up to **Likoma** district.
5. Over the years, the Bureau has provided legal aid services to a vast number of Malawians and currently it is handling over **27,500 cases** across the country. Further, the Bureau endeavors to reach out to the rural masses through public awareness campaigns, which promote legal literacy levels among rural communities. In the 10 years, the Bureau has recorded television and radio airings viewership/listenership of over **4 million** people.
6. The Bureau, in **August 2021**, switched from the old paper-based case management system to an **Electronic Case Management System**. We are proud to state that this shift has greatly improved the efficiency of the provision of legal aid services in Malawi.
7. The Bureau has hitherto formulated and launched **two Strategic Plans** to guide its operations: **2017-2021 Strategic Plan** and **2024-2029 Strategic Plan**.
8. Over the years the Bureau has collaborated with different stakeholders such as **Cornell Law School (USA)**, **Women Lawyers Association of Malawi**, **Mission Law of the United States**, **Paralegal Advisory Services Institute**, **Centre for Human Rights Education Advice and Assistance (CHREAA)**, **Palliative Care Association of Malawi (PACAM)**, **Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR)**, **Women Judges Association of Malawi (WOJAM)**, **Irish Rule of Law International**, **Reprieve (UK)**, and **Southern African Litigation**

**Centre (SALC)** to ensure that quality legal aid services continue to be made available to persons with insufficient financial means.

9. Notably, in **2019** the Bureau, in collaboration with its partners, won the **World Justice Challenge Award**, out of over 250 competitors worldwide, for its role in ensuring access to justice for all for under the Malawi Resentencing Project.

In this regard, we at the Bureau, would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the **Malawi Government**, development partners notably the **European Union (EU)** and the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**, as well as a multitude of other stakeholders and partners, including the ones mentioned above, for the support rendered to it during the last ten (10) years of its existence. It is the Bureau's firm position that with adequate resources, it has the potential to surpass its current milestones. **The Bureau's journey to bring justice closer and closest to the grassroots continues.**

**15<sup>th</sup> March, 2025**



**Chimwemwe Chithope-Mwale**

**Acting Director – Malawi Legal Aid Bureau**