

**Joint Shadow Report to the Committee on Enforced
Disappearances (CED): Human Rights situation of persons with
Albinism in Malawi**

By



Africa Albinism Network (AAN)

Email: info@africaalbinismnetwork.org

Website: www.africaalbinismnetwork.org



**Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM). Email:
albinismassociationmw@gmail.com**

Questions for the Government of Malawi

- What concrete measures is the Malawian government taking to ensure prompt, and effective investigations into disappearances of persons with albinism?
- How does the Malawian government ensure that law enforcement authorities initiate investigations ex officio, without delay and without requiring a formal complaint, in cases where persons with albinism are reported missing?
- What specific mechanisms are in place to prevent disappearance cases involving persons with albinism from becoming inactive or “cold,” including coordination across districts and border points, intelligence-led policing, and protection of complainants and witnesses from intimidation or reprisals?
- What forms of reparation are available to families of disappeared persons with albinism, and how does the State Party ensure guarantees of non-repetition, particularly considering reported pardons or early releases in serious albinism-related cases?
- In light of the prolonged investigations into cases of missing and disappeared persons with albinism, what measures has the State Party put in place to provide psychosocial support, legal assistance, and other forms of protection to victims’ families, including family members who continue to suffer trauma, uncertainty, and socio-economic hardship while awaiting information on the fate and whereabouts of their relatives?
- In light of the reported disappearances of two men with albinism, Mr. William Kamtchitchi (August 2025) and Mr. Israel Mbewe (November 2025), what concrete investigative steps has the Malawian government taken to locate these individuals, clarify their

fate or whereabouts, and bring any responsible non-State actors to justice, and how does the State Party ensure that such cases trigger immediate, ex officio investigations in accordance with Article 12(2) of the Convention?

1. Introduction, Scope and Methodology

Persons with albinism in Malawi have long been targeted for ritual attacks, abductions, killings, and grave desecrations driven by harmful superstitions and criminal exploitation. This report is submitted in the context of Malawi's obligations under the Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED). It is essential to emphasise that, while the Convention defines enforced disappearance in Article 2 through the involvement of State agents or persons acting with State authorisation, support, or acquiescence, Article 3 explicitly extends Malawi's duties to acts committed by private persons without State authorisation where the State must take "appropriate measures" to investigate and bring perpetrators to justice.¹

This point is especially relevant to disappearances involving persons with albinism, where the perpetrators are frequently reported as private actors criminal networks, intermediaries, or individuals motivated by ritual beliefs and profit yet the State's due diligence responsibilities remain fully engaged. Under Article 12(2), Malawi must ensure that competent authorities undertake an investigation *ex officio* whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe a disappearance has occurred, even without a formal complaint, and must guarantee that investigations are prompt, thorough, and effective.² Under Article 24, Malawi must ensure a victim-centred response: relatives of the disappeared have a right to know the truth about circumstances and fate, and the State must take appropriate measures to search for, locate, and return remains where

¹ ICPPED, art. 3; see also ICPPED, art. 2 (definition) read together with the State's due diligence duties under art. 3.

² ICPPED, art. 12(2).

death is suspected or confirmed, while providing access to reparation and other forms of support.³

This report responds to concerns raised in the reporting cycle regarding disappearances affecting persons with albinism and the adequacy of State measures to prevent and respond to such cases. Malawi has itself reported that attacks on persons with albinism have been recorded, including incidents involving disappearance, and it has referenced legislative, institutional, and policy steps taken to address this crisis.⁴ However, the resurgence of disappearance-linked incidents in 2025–2026 demonstrates that existing responses remain insufficient in practice and are not yet producing sustained safety, deterrence, and truth for victims and families.

This submission is based on civil society documentation, desk review of publicly available information, and consultations with organisations of persons with albinism and allied disability and human rights organisations in Malawi. It focuses on (i) the State’s due diligence duties where non-State actors commit disappearances and abductions against persons with albinism (Article 3), (ii) the State’s duty to investigate promptly and ex officio (Article 12(2)), and (iii) the rights of victims and families to truth, search, reparation, and support (Article 24). The reports is also based on documentaries, AANs data on reported cases of attack in Malawi.

2. Factual Context: Disappearances and the Current Risk Environment

2.1 A pattern of targeting that makes “missing” cases inherently high-risk

³ ICPPED, art. 24(2)–(6).

⁴ Malawi reporting during the review process notes attacks on persons with albinism, including cases involving disappearance, and outlines measures stated to be in place.

Disappearances of persons with albinism in Malawi cannot be treated as ordinary missing-person incidents. The long-standing pattern of attacks, trafficking in body parts, and grave desecrations has created a context in which any report of a missing person with albinism should be treated as high-risk, triggering immediate protective and investigative measures. The distinguishing feature is not only the vulnerability of the individual, but the documented modus operandi: abductions may be carried out swiftly, victims may be transported across district or national borders, evidence can be rapidly destroyed, and perpetrators may operate with community fear and silence.

This context is precisely why the Convention's ex officio duty to investigate is so important. Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a disappearance especially in a setting where persons with albinism have been repeatedly targeted authorities must act immediately and proactively.⁵ Delayed action is not a neutral administrative failure: it can directly determine whether a victim is found alive, whether evidence is preserved, and whether perpetrators are identified.

2.2 2025–2026 incidents showing renewed escalation

Against this established risk environment, Malawi has experienced a persistent and well-documented pattern of disappearances of persons with albinism over more than a decade, demonstrating that missing-person cases are not isolated or episodic events but part of a sustained threat landscape. Data collected and verified by civil society organisations indicate that, between 2013 and 2024, Malawi recorded multiple cases of persons with albinism reported missing, several of which later resulted in the recovery of mutilated remains, while others remain unresolved to date.

⁵ ICPPED, art. 12(2) (duty to investigate whenever there are reasonable grounds, including without formal complaint).

These cases occurred alongside a wider pattern of abductions, attempted abductions, killings, and grave desecrations, underscoring the interconnected nature of these violations and the heightened vulnerability of persons with albinism within the country.⁶ The recurring failure to promptly locate missing persons or conclusively resolve cases has contributed to a climate of fear, displacement, and mistrust in law enforcement responses among affected families and communities.

Throughout this period, reports consistently show that disappearances were often preceded by known risk indicators, including threats, suspicious surveillance, community rumours linked to ritual practices, and prior incidents targeting persons with albinism in the same localities. In several instances, families reported delays in police action, limited communication regarding investigative steps, and an absence of effective witness protection or intelligence-led follow-up.⁷ The cumulative effect of these shortcomings has been to normalise prolonged uncertainty for families, some of whom have waited years without information on the fate of their relatives, while suspects were neither promptly identified nor prosecuted. This pattern is particularly significant for the purposes of assessing due diligence obligations, as it reflects not merely individual investigative failures but a structural inability to prevent, respond to, and resolve disappearances in a context of known, recurring risk.

It is against this long-standing backdrop that the disappearances of William Kamtchitchi, reported missing in August 2025, and Israel Mbewe, reported missing in November 2025, must be understood. These cases did not arise in a vacuum; rather, they occurred within an environment

⁶ Under The Same Sun (UTSS), Reported Attacks Re: Persons with Albinism (Extended Version), Malawi country data, January 2026.

⁷ Ibid.; see also UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Report on her visit to Malawi, UN Doc. A/HRC/34/59/Add.1 (2017).

where previous disappearances had already established a clear warning signal requiring heightened vigilance and immediate response. In both cases, civil society actors and community members reportedly suspected foul play, given the broader and well-documented pattern of attacks on persons with albinism in Malawi. In such circumstances, international standards required that the authorities initiate without delay a high-priority investigative response, including rapid search and rescue operations, urgent dissemination of identifying information to local police posts and border points, coordinated intelligence collection, structured family liaison, and the preservation of any potential evidence.⁸ The absence of publicly available information indicating that such measures were systematically undertaken raises serious concerns regarding compliance with the obligation to act with urgency where there is a real and immediate risk to life.

Since 2013, official police records and corroborated civil society data indicate that Malawi has recorded ten cases of missing persons involving persons with albinism (Names of reporters withheld for confidentiality). These cases, which span more than a decade, are linked to the broader pattern of targeted attacks against persons with albinism and include incidents affecting both children and adults across multiple districts. The persistence of these unresolved cases highlights the gravity and continuity of the threat environment, as well as longstanding challenges in prevention, investigation, and resolution of disappearances.

Taken cumulatively, the record of missing-person cases from 2013 to 2026 demonstrates a sustained pattern of disappearances and related violations affecting persons with albinism in Malawi. The more recent

⁸ International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, arts. 3 and 12(2).

cases therefore represent not a new phenomenon but a continuation of a long-standing failure to effectively prevent disappearances, respond promptly when they occur, and provide families with truth, justice, and protection. This temporal continuity is critical to understanding the gravity of the situation and the heightened standard of diligence required of the State considering the known, recurring risks faced by persons with albinism.

2.3 Structural gaps acknowledged by Malawi heighten the risk of impunity

The State's own reporting demonstrates structural gaps that can directly undermine effective prevention and response. Malawi has stated that it is yet to establish a database of disappeared persons within the meaning of the Convention, citing incomplete domestication and implementation as part of the explanation.⁹ This matters because, without an effective database and harmonised case-tracking system, disappearances are vulnerable to fragmented handling, inconsistent classification, loss of investigative momentum across districts, and weak accountability for outcomes.

In addition, Malawi has acknowledged shortcomings relevant to detention record-keeping and the completeness of official registers under the Convention framework. While this report's primary focus is disappearances affecting persons with albinism frequently attributed to non-State actors, any weaknesses in national systems for documentation, traceability, and record integrity strengthen an overall environment in which persons can go missing and families can be left without authoritative answers. These systemic weaknesses therefore reinforce

⁹ Malawi statement in the reporting cycle on the absence of a Convention-meaning database and the linkage to domestication/implementation gaps.

the need for robust, proactive, and victim-centred measures in all high-risk disappearance cases.

2.4 Accountability signals and the risk of backsliding

The deterrent effect of criminal justice responses is especially important in a context where disappearances and killings are profit-driven and networked. Measures that appear to weaken accountability such as premature release practices in serious violence cases risk emboldening perpetrators and deepening fear among victims' families. For communities already living under threat, perceived impunity is not merely symbolic: it alters behaviour, reduces reporting, discourages witnesses, and may increase vulnerability.

For these reasons, Malawi's response must be judged not only by the existence of policies and committees, but by operational readiness: whether police act immediately; whether prosecutors and courts prioritise cases; whether witnesses are protected; whether families receive information and support; and whether accountability is consistent and sustained.

3. Article 3: Failure to Exercise Due Diligence Against Non-State Actor Disappearances (opening)

Article 3 obliges Malawi to take appropriate measures to investigate acts comparable to enforced disappearance committed by private persons and to bring those responsible to justice.¹⁰ In the context of persons with albinism, this duty requires more than routine policing. It requires a specialised, risk-informed approach proportionate to the known pattern of abduction, concealment, and trafficking. Where the State treats these cases as ordinary missing-person files without rapid escalation,

¹⁰ ICPPED, art. 3.

intelligence-driven investigation, cross-district coordination, or structured victim-family liaison, it fails to meet the Convention standard of due diligence.

The recent disappearance cases of persons with albinism in 2025 illustrate the necessity of this approach. In a context of documented targeting, the State must demonstrate (i) immediate mobilisation, (ii) sustained investigation until fate and whereabouts are clarified, and (iii) credible efforts to identify and dismantle networks behind the crimes. Where months pass without transparent progress or publicly communicated investigative steps, families are left in anguish and the risk of impunity deepens contrary to both the object and purpose of the Convention.

Article 3 of the Convention requires Malawi to take appropriate measures to investigate and prosecute acts amounting to enforced disappearance committed by private persons or groups. This obligation is not marginal or discretionary. It reflects the recognition by States that disappearances frequently occur in contexts where private actors operate in environments of weak law enforcement, social complicity, or institutional inertia. Where the State fails to act decisively, it becomes complicit in perpetuating the conditions that allow disappearances to continue.

3.1 Investigative inertia and the risk of cases “going cold”

The disappearances of William Kamtchitchi and Israel Mbewe illustrate how investigative inertia undermines Article 3 compliance. In both cases, there has been no publicly available indication of sustained, high-level investigative activity commensurate with the risk environment. Months have passed since the disappearances, yet families and civil society actors report an absence of clear updates, search outcomes, or arrests.

In a context where persons with albinism are known targets of abduction and ritual killing, such delays are not benign; they are predictably fatal.

The Convention's due diligence standard requires that investigations be effective in practice, not merely initiated on paper. This includes prompt deployment of investigators, systematic searches of likely locations, canvassing of witnesses, follow-up on intelligence leads, and coordination across districts and borders where trafficking networks are suspected. Where such measures are absent or sporadic, the State fails to meet its Article 3 obligations.

3.2 Impunity and the undermining of deterrence

Impunity remains a defining feature of crimes against persons with albinism in Malawi. While there have been some prosecutions and convictions, these are outweighed by the number of unresolved cases, particularly disappearances where victims' fate and whereabouts remain unknown. Each unresolved disappearance is a continuing violation: the disappeared person remains outside the protection of the law, and the family remains in a state of anguish and uncertainty.

The Convention's object and purpose require States to dismantle impunity, not merely manage it. Decisions that undermine accountability such as premature release or pardon of individuals convicted in serious violence cases linked to the albinism crisis risk eroding deterrence and signalling tolerance. For communities already living under threat, such actions deepen fear and discourage cooperation with law enforcement. From an Article 3 perspective, accountability must be credible, sustained, and proportionate to the gravity of the crimes.

3.3 Failure to dismantle criminal networks

Article 3 also entails a preventive dimension: States must address the structural and organised nature of disappearances. Attacks on persons with albinism in Malawi have repeatedly been linked to networks involving intermediaries, ritual practitioners, traffickers, and buyers of body parts. Effective compliance therefore requires intelligence-led policing aimed at identifying coordinators and financiers, not only arresting low-level perpetrators after the fact.

There is limited evidence that Malawi has established sustained, specialised investigative units with the mandate and resources to dismantle these networks. Without such measures, perpetrators adapt, relocate, and continue operating, and disappearances persist. The failure to take robust preventive action thus reinforces Article 3 violations and perpetuates the cycle of abuse.

4. Article 12(2): Failure to Promptly and Ex Officio Investigate Disappearances

Article 12(2) imposes one of the Convention's clearest obligations: whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe a person has been subjected to enforced disappearance, authorities must initiate an investigation without delay, even in the absence of a formal complaint. This duty is particularly salient in cases involving persons with albinism, where fear, stigma, and power imbalances may prevent families or witnesses from filing formal complaints immediately.

4.1 Delays that cost lives and evidence

In disappearance cases, time is decisive. The first hours and days are critical for locating victims alive, preserving evidence, and identifying suspects. Yet in Malawi, civil society actors report that police responses to missing persons with albinism are often slow and reactive. Families

may be required to insist repeatedly before meaningful action is taken, and large-scale search operations are rarely visible in the immediate aftermath.

The cases of William Kamtchitchi and Israel Mbewe exemplify these failures. Both men were reported missing in circumstances that provided reasonable grounds to suspect abduction. Under Article 12(2), this should have triggered immediate investigative action, including public alerts, engagement with border posts, and mobilisation of search resources. The apparent absence of such measures constitutes a clear breach of the Convention.

4.2 Failure to act ex officio and proactively

Article 12(2) explicitly rejects a complaint-driven model of investigation. Authorities must act ex officio their own initiative where there are reasonable grounds. In the Malawian context, the longstanding pattern of ritual killings and abductions of persons with albinism means that the threshold of “reasonable grounds” is easily met when a person with albinism disappears.

Despite this, investigations often appear to depend on family pressure, media attention, or NGO advocacy. This reactive approach contradicts the Convention and leaves families bearing the burden of mobilising the State. It also disadvantages those families who lack access to advocacy networks or fear reprisals.

4.3 Impartiality, interference, and witness protection

Article 12 requires investigations to be impartial and free from undue influence. In Malawi, past cases have raised serious concerns about official misconduct, including the torture and death of a key witness in custody in an albinism-related case. Although convictions followed,

subsequent pardons have cast doubt on the robustness of accountability mechanisms and the seriousness with which misconduct is treated.

Equally troubling is the absence of a comprehensive witness protection framework. Families and community members may fear retaliation from criminal networks or local accomplices if they cooperate with police. Without protection measures such as confidentiality safeguards, safe reporting channels, or physical protection valuable information may never be shared. This failure directly undermines Article 12(2) by weakening the effectiveness of investigations.

4.4 Lack of follow-through and transparency

Article 12(2) also implies continuity: investigations must continue until the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person are clarified. In practice, disappearance cases in Malawi often fade from active inquiry once initial leads are exhausted. Families report receiving little or no information about progress, and there is no institutionalised system of regular case review or family liaison.

This lack of transparency compounds harm. Families are left in uncertainty, and the absence of visible investigative activity fosters distrust. Treating disappearance cases as dormant files contradicts the Convention's understanding of enforced disappearance as a continuing offence and constitutes a persistent violation of Article 12(2).

5. Article 24: Denial of the Rights of Victims and Relatives

Article 24 places victims at the centre of the Convention. It recognises that enforced disappearance inflicts harm not only on the disappeared person but also on their relatives, who endure prolonged uncertainty, psychological suffering, and social and economic consequences. In

Malawi, the State's failures under Articles 3 and 12(2) directly translate into violations of Article 24.

5.1 Right to know the truth

Families of disappeared persons with albinism in Malawi are routinely denied their right to know the truth about the circumstances, progress of investigations, and fate of their loved ones. Months and years pass without official communication, leaving families in a state of permanent anguish. This silence is itself a form of harm.

The right to truth under Article 24(2) encompasses not only the final outcome of an investigation but also transparency about the steps taken. Malawi lacks formal protocols requiring authorities to keep families informed. As a result, families must rely on rumours, media reports, or NGO updates an indignity incompatible with the Convention.

5.2 Duty to search and return remains

Article 24(3) obliges States to take all appropriate measures to search for disappeared persons and, in the event of death, to locate, respect, and return their remains. In Malawi, search efforts are often limited, and forensic capacity is weak. Where remains are discovered, they may be incomplete, and there is little evidence of sustained efforts to locate missing body parts.

The desecration of Maunsamatha Zakaliya's grave highlights a further dimension of this obligation: the duty to respect and protect remains even after burial. Failure to secure graves and prevent post-mortem mutilation reflects a broader failure to guarantee dignity and non-repetition.

5.3 Right to reparation and support

Article 24(4)–(5) requires States to provide victims with reparation, including compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. In Malawi, there is no dedicated reparation scheme for families of disappeared or murdered persons with albinism. Families often face severe economic hardship, particularly where the disappeared person was a breadwinner.

Psychosocial support is also critically lacking. Trauma counselling and mental health services are scarce, despite repeated recognition by UN mechanisms that victims and families are deeply traumatised. The absence of such support exacerbates suffering and constitutes a failure to meet Article 24 obligations.

5.4 Legal and social consequences for families

Disappearances place families in legal limbo. Without confirmation of death, relatives may be unable to access property, manage estates, or secure guardianship arrangements. Malawi has not adopted specific legal mechanisms to address these consequences in disappearance cases, leaving families to navigate complex bureaucratic obstacles without guidance or assistance. This failure engages Article 24(6) and deepens the long-term impact of disappearances.

6. Recommendations

Strengthen prompt and effective investigations into disappearances of persons with albinism

The Government of Malawi should ensure that all cases involving missing persons with albinism are treated as high-risk and investigated promptly, thoroughly, and impartially. Law enforcement authorities should be instructed to initiate investigations *ex officio* and without delay, even in the absence of a formal complaint, where there are reasonable grounds to

suspect abduction or disappearance. Investigative measures should include immediate search operations, preservation of evidence, coordination across districts and border points, and sustained follow-up until the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person is clarified.

The Government of Malawi should make timely public statements on the status and progress of investigations into recent and ongoing cases of disappearances of persons with albinism, including the cases of William Kamtchitchi and Israel Mbewe. Such communication should be factual, respectful of due process, and aimed at informing affected families, communities, and the public of the steps being taken to search for the missing persons and to hold perpetrators accountable. Regular public updates would help fulfil victims' right to truth, counter fear and misinformation, restore public confidence in State institutions, and demonstrate the State's commitment to preventing impunity and further violations.

Enhance accountability and combat impunity for crimes against persons with albinism

The State should intensify efforts to identify, investigate, and prosecute all individuals involved in disappearances, abductions, killings, and grave desecrations of persons with albinism, including intermediaries and members of organised criminal networks. Measures should be taken to ensure that accountability is not undermined by premature releases, pardons, or other practices that weaken deterrence in serious albinism-related cases. Any decisions affecting sentences in such cases should be guided by the gravity of the crimes and the rights of victims and their families.

Build institutional capacity and specialised expertise within law enforcement and justice institutions

Training should focus on understanding disappearances as continuing violations, conducting time-sensitive investigations, protecting vulnerable witnesses, and addressing the specific risk factors linked to ritual killings and trafficking of body parts. Strengthening institutional capacity will improve investigative effectiveness and contribute to guarantees of non-repetition.

Uphold the rights of victims and families to truth, search, and support

The State should establish clear mechanisms to ensure that families of disappeared persons with albinism are regularly informed of investigative progress and search efforts. Authorities should intensify searches for missing persons and, where death is suspected or confirmed, take all appropriate measures to locate, respect, and return remains for dignified burial. In addition, the Government should provide accessible psychosocial support, legal assistance, and interim relief to affected families, recognising the severe trauma and socio-economic impact caused by disappearances.

Ensure reparation and guarantees of non-repetition for affected communities

The Government of Malawi should develop and implement a framework for reparation for victims of disappearance and related violence against persons with albinism, including compensation, rehabilitation, and satisfaction measures. Legal and administrative pathways should be created to address the civil status, property, and guardianship challenges faced by families of disappeared persons. Furthermore, sustained public education and awareness-raising initiatives should be strengthened to

dismantle harmful myths about albinism, engaging traditional leaders, religious authorities, and the media to prevent future violations.

Establish protection and incentive mechanisms for witnesses and informants in disappearance cases involving persons with albinism (Articles 12 and 24)

The Government of Malawi should adopt concrete measures to protect witnesses, informants, and community members who provide information relating to disappearances, abductions, and other crimes against persons with albinism. Such measures should include confidential and safe reporting channels, safeguards against intimidation or reprisals, and, where necessary, temporary protection or relocation. In addition, the State should consider introducing an incentive or reward mechanism for credible information leading to the location of missing persons or the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators, while ensuring due process and the safety and dignity of informants. These measures would strengthen investigations, encourage community cooperation with law enforcement, and contribute to the prevention of future disappearances.

7. Conclusion

These recommendations are intended to strengthen Malawi's compliance with the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and to create a safer, more protective environment for persons with albinism. Their effective implementation would significantly contribute to preventing further disappearances, restoring trust in State institutions, and ensuring that victims and their families can enjoy their rights to life, dignity, truth, and justice.

LIST OF REFERENCES

1. PRESS BRIEFING STATEMENT ON RECENT TRIGGERING CASES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST PERSONS WITH ALBINISM IN MALAWI. <https://web.facebook.com/share/p/1GQ3GA5aXL/>
2. Malawi reporting during the review process notes attacks on persons with albinism, including cases involving disappearance.
3. Under The Same Sun (UTSS), Reported Attacks Re: Persons with Albinism (Extended Version), Malawi country data, January 2026.
4. UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Report on her visit to Malawi, UN Doc. A/HRC/34/59/Add.1 (2017).
5. International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, arts. 3 and 12(2).