

22 October 2019

Malawi: House of human rights defender McDonald Sembereka attacked

On 21 October 2019, human rights defender **Reverend McDonald Sembereka**'s house was attacked by five unknown men in camouflage clothing. The attackers fired gun shots in the direction of McDonald Sembereka's house at around 1a.m. in Nyewa, in the city of Lilongwe, along the Lilongwe-Mchinji road. Before leaving, they shouted death threats at the human rights defender telling him that he'll be killed if he doesn't end his involvement in ongoing post-electoral demonstrations in Malawi.

[Reverend MacDonald Sembereka](#) is a human rights defender and coordinator at the Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC), a network of local civil society organisations working on increasing the accountability of government officials and promoting civil and political rights in Malawi.

On 21 October 2019, the assailants shot in direction of McDonald Sembereka's house, and threw petrol bombs outside his gate. They approached his premises, and fired more gun shots. They threatened Reverend Sembereka telling him to cease his involvement in the post-election demonstrations. They later escaped in a Toyota Cienta vehicle after realising Sembereka had his own personal security. The matter has been reported to local police but no arrests have been made.

This attack is believed to be part of a pattern of harassment against human rights defenders following mass protests denouncing irregularities in the presidential elections held on 21 May 2019. In particular, human rights defenders and individuals associated with HRCC have been targeted. McDonald Sembereka and his colleagues have been organising demonstrations demanding the resignation of Jane Ansah, the Chairperson of Malawi Electoral Commission after she failed to respond to claims of electoral irregularities. In similar circumstances, there was an attempted killing of human rights defender **Timothy Mtambo**. On 10 October 2019, several gunshots were fired by unknown assailants at the human rights defender as he was driving home from his place of work. On 15 August 2019, his house and car were subject to a petrol bomb attack. A number of weeks previously, his office was targeted in a similar attack.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the increase in violent attacks on human rights defenders in Malawi, as it believes that they are solely motivated the by human rights defenders' legitimate work in defence of human rights and the promotion of democratic values.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Malawi to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of McDonald Sembereka as well as of the members of his family and organisation;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack on the residence of McDonald Sembereka, and the threats and attacks received by those close to him, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;

3. Cease targeting human rights defenders in Malawi and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 5: *“For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully”* and Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threat, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director