



Malawi – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 21 October 2016

Is there any information on vigilante justice in Malawi?

A report from Al Jazeera states:

“Frustrated with a spate of armed robberies and deep flaws in Malawi's criminal justice system, some people in this southern African country have decided to punish suspected criminals on their own volition. Local media have published graphic pictures of suspects brutally attacked and burned by civilians. In November 2013, an angry mob in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe, killed three suspected armed robbers at a bank at the City Mall. An angry mob surrounded the robbers after a shop owner gunned down the driver of the getaway car, and police attempting to rescue the alleged criminals were chased away by the crowd. Frustrated Malawians have also torched police stations that refuse to release the suspects they want to ‘deal’ with. More than six police stations across the country were burned last year alone in protest against their refusal to hand over suspects deemed to deserve mob justice.” (Al Jazeera (20 February 2014) *Poor policing spurs Malawians to mob justice*)

An article published by Africa Law Times states:

“Exasperated with a spate of robberies and deep flaws in criminal justice system, Malawi remains one of the countries where people have decided to punish suspected criminals on their own volition. Public lynching, setting people alight, brutal beatings are the many ways mobs in Malawi manifest their own form of justice. On November 15 2014 a mob killed a Kabaza man (bicycle taxi-man) in a case of mistaken identity. According to Malawi's online newspaper Nyasatimes.com a yet to be identified bicycle taxi-man was set ablaze and killed when a lynch mob mistook him for a thief in the capital city Lilongwe.” (Africa Law Times (7 December 2014) *Mob Justice and Its Implications to the Rule of Law in Malawi*)

A Voice of America news report states:

“The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed grave concern over a surge of mob killings in Malawi against people accused of murder and, in some cases, suspected of witchcraft. U.N. monitors say at least 16 people reportedly have been killed across Malawi over the past two months. The U.N. human rights office says it does not know what is triggering the increase in killings. In one instance, according to spokeswoman Cecile Pouilly, a mob stormed a police station, taking a man out of his cell and killing him. She says it happened in the city of Dedza, located 85 kilometers from the capital, Lilongwe. She adds the population is frightened and very worried.” (Voice of America (5 April 2016) *UN Concerned about Surge in Mob Killings in Malawi*)

A Voice of America news report states:

“Police in southern Malawi say a mob has burned to death seven men who allegedly possessed human bones to be used for witchcraft. The head of the Nsanje district police force, Kirby Kaunga, told reporters Wednesday that the mob rounded up the victims Tuesday and then set them on fire. Police are investigating but have not made any arrests.” (Voice of America (2 March 2016) *Malawi Mob Burns 7 Over Human Bones*)

See also article from UJ newspaper The Times which states:

“Vigilante mobs are targeting 'albino hunters' in Malawi as the government fails to tackle abductions and murders. Albino people are being killed for their body parts in Malawi, Africa's poorest country. Witch doctors use them in potions that they claim will bring wealth, success and love.

Last week seven men were killed by villagers who overheard a telephone conversation with one of them and found human bones in his bag. A mob doused the men with petrol and set them alight. Police arrived a day later. It is not known whether the bones belonged to an albino. No one has been charged with killing the seven men.” (The Times (7 March 2016) *Mobs kill gangs hunting albinos for witchcraft*)

An Agence France Presse report on this incident states:

“A mob in southern Malawi burned seven men to death for allegedly possessing human bones for use in witchcraft, police said on Wednesday. The seven were ‘found in possession of human bones and the mob took it upon themselves to burn them with petrol,’ Kirby Kaunga, head of the Nsanje district police, told AFP. A traditional chief said local suspicions were aroused as a result of the movements and telephone conversations of one of the seven, who was found to have a bag containing the bones. ‘He was chased and arrested,’ chief Tengani, who only uses one name, told AFP. ‘The man is said to have confirmed that his bag contained human bones and that’s when the mob began rounding up the seven and burned them, one by one.’ Images from the scene showed the men being burned on a patch of grass surrounded by locals, with some children looking on. Police arrived after the incident, which took place on Tuesday in Nsanje, the southernmost district of Malawi. So far, there have been no arrests.” (Agence France Presse (2 March 2016) *Malawi mob burns 7 to death over suspected witchcraft*)

A report published by the Centre international pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme (CIPADH), in a paragraph headed “Popular justice and mob killings replace a distrusted judiciary”, states:

“In the last month, 16 people have been killed through mob killings or popular led justice in Malawi. Nicholas Gondwa, the spokesperson for Malawi’s Police, declared that law enforcers are doing all they can to prevent such killings. Nonetheless, Cécile Pouilly from the OHCHR in Geneva recalls that ‘in by far the worst incident reported this year, seven people accused of possessing human bones were attacked and set on fire by a mob on 1 March in Nsanje’s district’. The presumed criminal was already imprisoned in the cell of Dedza’s city Police Station when protestors stormed the building and applied their merciless mob justice. In another noticeable case, four elderly

people were also beaten to death in the Neno district last January 2016 as they were accused of being responsible of witchcraft by allegedly murdering a 17 years old teenager who had succumbed to a lightning.” (Centre international pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme (CIPADH) (7 April 2016) *Mob killings and Witchcraft murders hit Malawi's society*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

References:

Africa Law Times (7 December 2014) *Mob Justice and Its Implications to the Rule of Law in Malawi*

<http://africalawtimes.com/mob-justice-and-its-implications-to-the-rule-of-law-in-malawi/>

(Accessed 21 October 2016)

Agence France Presse (2 March 2016) *Malawi mob burns 7 to death over suspected witchcraft*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 21 October 2016)

Al Jazeera (20 February 2014) *Poor policing spurs Malawians to mob justice*

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/02/poor-policing-spurs-malawians-mob-justice-20142171132603317.html>

(Accessed 21 October 2016)

Centre international pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme (CIPADH) (7 April 2016) *Mob killings and Witchcraft murders hit Malawi's society*

<http://www.cipadh.org/en/mob-killings-and-witchcraft-murders-hit-malawi%E2%80%99s-society>

(Accessed 21 October 2016)

The Times (7 March 2016) *Mobs kill gangs hunting albinos for witchcraft*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 21 October 2016)

Voice of America (5 April 2016) *UN Concerned about Surge in Mob Killings in Malawi*

<http://www.voanews.com/a/un-says-mob-killing-in-malawi-on-the-rise/3270010.html>

(Accessed 21 October 2016)

Voice of America (2 March 2016) *Malawi Mob Burns 7 Over Human Bones*

<http://www.voanews.com/a/malawi-mob-burns-7-over-human-bones/3216132.html>

(Accessed 21 October 2016)

Sources Consulted:

Al Jazeera
Electronic Immigration Network
European Country of Origin Information Network
Google
Lexis Nexis
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
UNHCR Refworld
Voice of America