CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT DELIVERED DURING THE CSO AND CROSS-PARTY DIRECTORATES OF WOMEN SOLIDARITY PRESS BRIEFING ON TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS (VAWE)

DATE: Wednesday, 22nd January 2025, Golden Peacock Hotel, Lilongwe

The NGO Gender Coordination Network, The Women's Manifesto Movement and the African Women Leaders Network, 50/50 Campaigners and other CSOS, condemn in the strongest terms, all forms of violence perpetrated against women in politics and elections in Malawi. The range of experiences of women and other marginalized groups political lives in Malawi have been the stories of abuse, violence, intimidation, harassment and the fear of violence; online and offline, that have impeded women's participation and their full contribution to political life.

Today, we remember all the women who have experienced violence in their various forms in our country. It has become clear that Malawi is no longer providing a safe place for women who are in politics and other public offices. The recent cases reported by the media, among others the shooting of Mayi Brenda Saidi, a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) member in Lilongwe, the assault of women dressed in Malawi Congress Party (MCP) regalia in Ndirande, the demeaning remarks made against President of the Peoples Party Her Excellency Joyce Banda in a clip that went into circulation on the social media, the recent dehumanising clip that attacked the MEC Chairperson; Annabel Mtalimanja and many other reported and unreported cases indicate an increase of incidences of violence against women in politics and electoral processes. This violence is also supported by the growing threats of Gender Based Violence facilitated through technology, online, and in social media. The continued threat to the lives of the survivors and those at risk of Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE) is indicative of a widespread crisis and of deeply ingrained violence and discrimination against women and girls in Malawi

Violence Against Women in Politics and VAWE is a human rights violation and a violation of women's political rights. We further view Violence Against Women in politics as a threat to our democracy and a threat to the 50-50 campaign as women this violence instills fear in women to actively take part in politics and affects their performance. VAWE stands to erode all the gains that Malawi has made in empowering women to participate in politics and public life.

We stand with all survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and VAWE and remain committed to helping eliminate GBV in the country. We will work to support, empower, and protect survivors of GBV and those at-risk across the country. We believe that gender equality is essential in achieving a more prosperous future for Malawi, and that a critical first step is the protection of, and prevention of violence against women and girls. For Malawi is to make developmental strides, it is vital that women's voices are heard and respected at all levels.

The 50/50 campaigners through various programs and project will engage political party structures on tackling VAWE, we will work with Directorates of Women and Directorates of Youth to mobilise active citizenship against VAWE, we will do media and community based campaigns on tackling VAWE and work with the Malawi Police and other institutions to end this program. We will continue to push for the prosecution of the perpetrators. The NGO Gender Coordination Network, Women's Manifesto Movement, African Women Leader's Network work to support, empower, and protect survivors of GBV and those at-risk across the country. We use a multifaceted approach to prevent and respond to GBV, including systemic change through advocacy and policy efforts at the institutional level, building the protection capacity of front-line service providers, and providing trauma-informed, comprehensive care to survivors of violence and those at-risk.

We , at this point make the following calls to various duty bearers:

1. **Malawi Government**

- Implement the Political Empowerment of Women strategy which among other things provides for mechanisms for preventing VAWE.
- Ensure the effective implementation of Malawi Gender Equality Act which outlaws all forms of discrimination against women including that which takes place in politics.
- Ensure that the Cyber Security Act is implemented to address the growing Technology facilitated GBV.

2. **Political parties**

- Political party leadership should rise to the occasion and condemn all forms of violence against women in elections regardless of which political party is affected.
- Political parties should put in place mechanisms to protect women from all forms of violence.
- Political parties should adhere to the commitment made under the Gender Transformative and Youth Inclusive Project implemented by Oxfam and Wolrec and the Code of Conduct on prevention of violence which they signed under UN Women led Initiative.

3. **Political Party supporters**

- Should recognize the rights of women and desist from inciting or committing any form of violence against any woman regardless of political affiliations.
- Report any person inciting violence against women in elections to appropriate authorities.

4. **Malawi Police Service**

- We call upon the law enforcement agencies to apprehend and prosecute the culprits of Violence against women in Elections.
- Share widely with the citizens the plans developed to ensure that the journey towards 16 September 2025 elections is peaceful and free from Violence.

5. **Human Rights Commission**

- The Commission should monitor and evaluate government and political party policies and procedures, in order to promote gender equality and make any recommendations that the Commission deems necessary.

- The Commission should work collaboratively with 50/50 campaigners and the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) in promoting civic education and awareness on gender equality, and raise public awareness on violence against women in elections, including prevention and response mechanisms.
- The Commission should investigate violations against women in the political sphere.

The NGO Gender Coordination Network (NGO–GCN) is a non-partisan Umbrella body of 63 local NGOs that promote gender equality and equity and women empowerment.

The Women's Manifesto Movement is a group of diverse international and local NGOs that advocate for women's rights using the Women's Manifesto which is a document that contains women's voice on various issues that affect their lives.

African Women Leaders Network – Malawi Chapter is a Pan African platform that brings together women leaders from the different spheres of our society.

Our co- conveners for the solidarity press conference; Oxfam and Wolrec are implementing a 3 year Gender Transformative and Youth Inclusive Democracy Project (1st November 2023 to 31st March 2027) that aims to support the increase in representation and participation of women, youth and marginalized groups in politics at all levels and especially in the 2025 Elections.

Signed



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