



Media alert

Roundtable on Alternatives to Immigration Detention in Malawi:

Lilongwe, 5 May 2017: The Malawi Government will hold a roundtable on alternatives to detention with UN partners, civil society organisations and a visiting international delegation on May 8th May 2017.

In recent years, Malawi has emerged as both an origin and transit destination for migrants travelling through the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa, where routes are rife with smugglers and human traffickers. Hundreds of undocumented migrants (mainly from the Horn of Africa) have been locked up in Malawi's prisons for sometimes up to year, exacerbating overcrowding in the country's jails.

As a member of the Southern African Development Community and a signatory to the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the Malawi Government has committed to explore alternatives to immigration detention, especially for children.

The Minister for Home Affairs and Internal Security, the Honourable Grace Chiumia M.P. says, "we take our commitments to the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA) process seriously, and we are looking forward to exploring ways to strengthen our current processes."

The visiting delegation includes the Director of the International Detention Coalition, an international civil society network of members in 77 countries, which has identified over 250 alternatives to detention worldwide. IDC Director, Mr. Grant Mitchell states, "we commend the Government for considering a National Referral Mechanism. We see a lot of potential in helping Malawi implement these systems to sustain them for the foreseeable future."

The roundtable will include a discussion about policy and findings from international research which show that there are more affordable, effective and humane ways to manage migration other than imprisonment. The meeting will present the 2016 Malawi Immigration Law Audit report, which identifies opportunities for Malawi to quickly and simply expand alternatives to detention.

IDC's latest research in Africa has mapped immigration detention legislation, policies and practices in Egypt, Kenya, Libya, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. It shows that significant cost savings are possible if alternatives to immigration detention are used instead of prisons.

"Alternatives can cost up to 80% less than immigration detention" says Mr. Mitchell, "Malawi really has an opportunity here to improve systems and save costs."

The Roundtable will take place on May 8th 2017 from 8.30am – 5pm, at the Sunbird Lilongwe Hotel. The Honourable Minister will open the event at 9.00 a.m. Media are welcome to attend.

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