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Eighteen People Killed in Bloody Repression of Peaceful Protests

- Pays - Malawi -

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On Friday 29 July, the ITUC wrote to the president of Malawi to strongly protest the bloody repression of peaceful protests in various cities of the southern African country on 20 and 21 July. Indiscriminate violence from the authorities led to the death of 18 people.

Civil society, including Malawi's trade unions, has been critical of a number of recent laws which limit the freedom of the press, restrict lawsuits against government agencies and officers, and limit civil liberties. Under the current situation, the Malawian police can, e.g., search any house without a search warrant, and the press cannot publish anything which is "*deemed to be contrary to the public interest*". Protestors also wanted to protest against the quickly deteriorating economic conditions, characterised by crippling fuel and foreign exchange shortages. The workers of Malawi have been hit hard by the economic crisis. Shortage of foreign exchange means that companies cannot bring in raw materials and parts, which has resulted in massive job losses. Shortages cause basic goods to become unaffordable.

Despite the brutal police crackdown, protestors took their demands to the district commissioners, and called on the president to address these demands by 16 August. Subsequently, a great number of local civil society leaders and labour leaders had to go into hiding, as they fear for their lives after having received threats.

"*This is not worthy of a country which adheres to the principles of democracy*," said ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow. "*Confronted with such particularly harsh conditions as the ones currently hitting Malawi, citizens and civil society organisations should not face even tougher repression when standing up for their basic rights.*"

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