



CENTRE FOR POLICY
AND REFORM IN HEALTH
AND LAW (CPR)

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For immediate release

THE KABAZA CONUDRUM: A HUMAN RIGHTS EMERGENCY ON MALAWI'S ROADS

Limbe, Blantyre, Malawi, 23rd December 2025.

Centre for Policy and Reform in Health and Law (CPR) is a registered non-governmental organization incorporated under the laws of Malawi, comprising of young licensed medical doctors and lawyers dedicated to advancing health policy advocacy, reform, legal empowerment in healthcare, and the promotion of health-related human rights in Malawi.

As Malawi decided to observe Kabaza day on 22nd December 2025, the Centre for Policy and Reform in Health and Law (CPR) raises urgent concern over the ongoing kabaza crisis which now constitutes a critical public health and human rights emergency. Kabaza related accidents claim thousands of lives, cause permanent injuries, and strain the country's public health budget an estimated MK3.3 billion annually. In 2022-2023 alone, over 1,800 deaths were reported. The Malawi Police Service reports a 14% increase in kabaza related accidents in the

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first quarter of 2025. The Lilongwe Institute of Orthopedics and Neurosurgery (LION) has said kabaza accidents account for between 50% and 70% of patients treated at the facility. Behind every statistic is a family robbed of income, dignity, and too often life.

The root causes of this crisis are multifaceted ranging from underage riders, exceeding passenger limits, non-use of protective gears, inadequate training, inadequate road infrastructure, and poor enforcement of traffic rules. Many kabaza operators lack licences, helmets, and insurance putting themselves and their passengers at risk. This is worsened by the unknown health status of kabaza drivers. Unchecked health conditions such as poor eyesight, hearing impairments, untreated epilepsy, and other health issues impair driving ability, increasing the risk of accidents.

Kabaza accidents directly threaten fundamental rights enshrined in Malawi's Constitution, including the right to life, health, human dignity, work and non-discrimination. The state has the obligation to protect, respect and fulfill these rights by preventing the foreseeable loss of life and protecting citizens from avoidable harm.

To address these multi-faceted issues, CPR advocates for a multi-stakeholder approach through a nationwide framework and policy. The Ministry of Transport and Public Works must develop and enforce regulations for kabaza operations that include their registration, road safety infrastructure by revisiting existing road designs, safety standards for kabaza such as mandatory periodic technical inspection, licenses, training, age limits for passengers because of the high vulnerability of children, reliable traffic enforcement, and the creation of kabaza

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associations with incentives. The Directorate of Road Traffic and Safety Services should strengthen enforcement of traffic rules and promote public awareness. The Ministry of Health plays a crucial role in providing medical support for accident victims, conducting health checks, and advocating for safety measures.

Insurance companies have a crucial role to play offering affordable products for kabaza operators to incentivize safe practices. Kabaza associations such as the Malawi Coalition for Kabaza Associations and Stakeholders (Makokasa) should collaborate on safety initiatives and promote training of kabaza operators. Therefore, capacity building through training programs on safety, traffic rules, and customer service is essential.

CPR urges the government, stakeholders, and law enforcement to prioritize kabaza safety of the operators, passengers and all other road users. This is not optional as lives depend on it. Malawi can draw lessons from countries such as Rwanda where structured regulation and consistent enforcement have sharply reduced kabaza fatalities and related costs. CPR remains committed to advocating for an immediate human rights approach to protect operators, passengers, and all road users.



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For and on behalf of: Centre for Policy and Reform in Health and Law (CPR)

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