

Universal Periodical Review

Fourth Cycle
50th Working Group

Malawi



Right to Life

Decriminalization of Suicides

7th of April 2025

“From the politics of taking life to the politics of affirming it”

**We understand the right to life as being
the joyful and universal fulfillment of life,
everyone's responsibility to sustain life,
and as being the right not to be killed.**

We are all at the center of our lives,
We are all global on our single planet,
We all need to respect and to cherish life:
Freely, we are all Centers for Global Nonkilling¹.

Your Center for Global Nonkilling (CGNK) has a unique mission
Inspirational for Individuals – Creative for Societies
*“Promote change toward the measurable goal of a killing-free world
by means of infinite human creativity, in reverence for life”.*

Nonkilling is a paradigm, a principle and a plan.
Giving worth to universal life by sustaining it for all individuals and for humanity is the paradigm.
Each and every individual undertaking the equal and universal fulfillment of life is the principle.
A happy humanity, on a happy to live on planet, with a happy future
is the plan and the desired result².

Universal fundamental human methods
– as we have universal fundamental human rights and freedoms –
is the roadmap.

Nonkilling is one of these universal human fundamental methods³.
Valuing life and the quality of life,
to preserve it and make it flourish,
now as for future generations,
by knowing, preventing and measuring
occurrences where life can and should be valued and saved.

The Center for Global Nonkilling was founded in 2008 by Glenn Paige (1929-2017),
Professor of Political Science and author of the widely translated book “Nonkilling Political Science”⁴.
We have United Nations’ ECOSOC consultative status since 2014⁵.
We do Universal Periodic Reviews and participate to the Human Rights Council at all sessions.

We make a systematic call to all States for the urgent and universal ratification of the Convention on the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. We make UPR submissions to all States still in need to do this ratification.

We make a systematic call to all States for the urgent and universal decriminalization of suicides. We make UPR submissions to all States still in need to do this decriminalization.

We make a systematic call to all people and all States for the enhancement and the implementation of the life and peace constitutions, for the fulfillment and respect of all human rights.

We deliver UPR submissions, statements and recommendations as we deem necessary⁶.

“Happy people breed a happy world”

Universal Periodic Review of Malawi

We wish a happy, constructive and peaceful UPR
to the People and the Authorities of Malawi.

This is our first submission for the Universal Periodic Review of Malawi.

Suicide Prevention

We are all here to celebrate life, its beauty and its generosity,
We are all here to celebrate life in dignity, together in humanity, for its future,
We are all here to celebrate life at every instant, big and small,
We are all here to celebrate life by preventing and overcoming
its shortages, disruptions or failures.
Preventing suicides is a global imperative⁷ and a legal duty⁸.

Decriminalization of suicides

Life is a gift and a responsibility, individually as in common.

Bringing life to happiness and worth for all is a chosen and noble goal; protecting life as required by international law thus largely preventing and eradicating suicide is a laudable duty.

This decriminalization demand is based on the existence of a penalty for attempting suicide in the Penal code of the Malawi, article 229⁹. Needs and effects of decriminalization are based on the duty of States to protect life and are inferred from the World Health Organization's work on suicide prevention¹⁰ and WHO's latest publication in 2023 directly addresses the topic: "WHO policy brief on the health aspects of decriminalization of suicide and suicide attempts"¹¹.

Decriminalization is needed to attain better suicide prevention, and thus greater respect for the right to life by States. The Human Rights Council adopted by consensus a resolution calling for "non-coercive measures" to address mental health issues¹². Decriminalization serves as an efficient tool to progress and achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3.4.2: "To reduce of a third, by 2030, the number of deaths attributed to suicide"¹³. Preventing suicides is also mentioned in the Human Rights Committee general comment 36¹⁴. SDIS States adopted, in Barbados in 2023 a declaration on Non-communicable disease and mental health which includes decriminalization of suicides¹⁵.

Decriminalization of self-inflicted suicide highly helps prevention.

Instead of stigma, it raises awareness and care for life. Instead of secrecy and isolation, it opens safe spaces for health; gentle care for the concerned persons and their relatives, spaces in which to seek for help and where healing can be done without fear. It opens avenues for better training and dedication of medical and social staff. Instead of stigma, threat and force imposed, an added burden on already vulnerable and fragile persons, decriminalization brings and adds goodwill and benevolence to these persons, to their situations. It transfers otherwise used resources (repression) for information and prevention campaigns such as hotlines and care centers.

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Persons concerned by suicides and attempts will know they can genuinely have access to counsel, help and healing. Medical personal and other health and social workers will deliver their services honestly, without threat or fear of coercion for the concerned person, or challenges to their medical duty of confidentiality. People attempting suicide or having ideation of suicide often express through it a major call for help. **This call for lifesaving help must be easily heard and adequately answered to.** These persons need steady, strong, open and solid support for their existence rather than threat, shame and blame, or unpredictable punishment or deprivations. They need to be able to do their works of resilience and social integration or reintegration in integrity and without added legal burdens. Decriminalization helps policy makers to do the much needed political valuation of life. Though more reporting may occur soon after decriminalization, decriminalization is proven to be a suicide rate reducing measure¹⁶. It also garners accurate reporting and statistics, thus giving adequate tools to the authorities to draw life-saving policies¹⁷. Decriminalization creates strong motives and incentives for all the other life protecting and enhancing measures and policies, creating a culture of respect for life, and a space of civic cooperation, enabling society to thrive into happiness, more happiness for all its people.

Suicide prevention in Malawi

Firsthand data related to suicides in Malawi is not directly available¹⁸.

Using to the World Health Organization database (2019, before Covid), the rate of suicides for 100,000 persons is rather low compared to the world's rate: 5.4/100,000 (world: = 9.2/100,000)¹⁹. This is still estimated 500 ~ lives lost yearly in the country, all of them precious.

Malawi has multiple mental health helplines²⁰. However, according to numerous press reports, there is a sharp rise in the number of suicides²¹.

Suicide decriminalization in other countries

India decriminalized in 2017²², Nepal in 2018²³, Guyana²⁴ and Pakistan in 2022²⁵, Malaysia in 2023²⁶. Ireland started its prevention strategy by decriminalizing in 1993. We are preparing and waiting for more countries to decriminalize soon. They are to our modest knowledge between 20 and 30 countries in the world still in need to do this decriminalization.

We encourage the People and the Authorities of Malawi to urgently decriminalize suicide and to set up suicide prevention mechanisms. We encourage to support Malawi in its suicide prevention efforts, inter alia by recommending suicide decriminalization.

**Calling on each and all to attain a nonkilling world,
where life can be peacefully sustained on Earth,
we welcome the delegation of Malawi to Geneva, a City of Peace
and we wish you, as to all the people of Malawi,
a constructive, successful, enhancing and fulfilling
Universal Periodic Review.**

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¹ <http://nonkilling.org/center/how-to-help>

² It is S.M.A.R.T: Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realist and Timely.

Simple: Happiness. Measurable: life's existence is a 1 or 0 factor, most simple alive or not; reducing unwanted deaths occurrences (injury and violence) is measurable. Achievable, on many lifesaving topics, prevention works and progresses, longevity largely proves it. Realist: life is first among equal human rights, if life is canceled all rights are canceled. Timely: it is always time to save a life, when climate change threatens all human lives it is time to go nonkilling for all lives.

³ Listing some of these fundamental and universal human methods in a somewhat free order of importance would be education, participation, inner and outer celebration of life, peacemaking, minimum standards of living, prevention, and if need be peaceful settlements of disputes. As one may see, both human rights and peace encompass these methods. Keywords could well be “do no harm”, “nonviolence”,

⁴ <http://nonkilling.org/center/publications-media/books-translations>

⁵ We are present at all sessions of the Human Rights Council and we systematically do Universal Periodic Reviews submissions since 2015.

⁶ We are apt and equipped, using statistic, indicators and local information for doing complete country portraits, or partial scans of the status of the rights to life and to peace in any given country. See examples here, the most recent one being San Marino in July 2024, a killing-free country. Shall you wish to see it done for your own country or anyone, please contact our office, the author of this submission or our UN team.

<https://nonkilling.org/center/nonkilling-monitoring-programs/nonkilling-activity-at-the-un/>

⁷ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564779>

⁸ CCPR (The Maldives is a party to CCPR) General comment 36 § 9 and 21. <https://docs.un.org/en/CCPR/C/GC/36>

⁹ <https://media.malawili.org/files/legislation/akn-mw-act-1929-22-eng-2014-12-31.pdf>

United for Global Mental Health, 2024 report “decriminalizing suicides, saving lives, reducing stigma”, 2024 version, p. 52.

<https://unitedgmh.org/the-global-advocate/decriminalising-suicide-saving-lives-reducing-stigma/>

We did not do a jurisprudence or statistical research to know if they are punishment cases.

Whatsoever, the law needs to change to open up for more prevention.

¹⁰ WHO country guide: “LIVE LIFE: An implementation guide for suicide prevention in countries”, 2021. Quoted “Who. Live life”,

<https://www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/9789240026629>.

Various mentions of decriminalization with examples of successes and effects are found therein.

See also WHO: “National suicide prevention strategies. Progress, examples and indicators”, 2018.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/national-suicide-prevention-strategies-progress-examples-and-indicators>

A WHO general overview on suicide (WHO news-room on suicide): <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>

All WHO publications on suicides: https://www.who.int/publications/i?healthtopics=1822c912-624e-414c-aa36-7fac6c6958c9_d96f810d-4734-477f-829e-3b8a4cfd2909,94489630-4c06-4ff1-91cf-3d15b824556d

Suicide prevention day, 10th of September yearly: <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-suicide-prevention-day/2022>

¹¹ Who on decriminalization: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240078796>

¹² Criminalization is coercive ... https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/52/L.15, operative paragraph 5.

¹³ Text of the Goal is here summarized for direct understanding; the complete version reads:

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Target 3.4: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being. *Emphasis added.*

Indicator 3.4.2: Number of Deaths Attributed to Suicide.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>

¹⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/general-comment-no-36-article-6-right-life>

¹⁵ <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/2023-bridgetown-declaration-on-ncds-and-mental-health>

¹⁶ United for Mental Health: “Decriminalizing Suicide: Saving Lives, Reducing Stigma”, 2021 version, p.5.

<https://unitedgmh.org/knowledge-hub/its-time-to-decriminalise-suicide-reducing-stigma-and-saving-lives/>.

Wu KC-C, Cai Z, Chang Q, *et al.* “Criminalization of suicide and suicide rates: an ecological study of 171 countries in the world”, 2022. *BMJ Open* 2022;12:e049425. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2021-049425 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8860012>

¹⁷ WHO, “Suicide prevention: a global imperative”, 2014, p. 51. It clearly shows that rates will only be accurate if suicides are decriminalized, even if they may rise in the beginning because decriminalization increases reporting.

¹⁸ <https://malawi.opendataforafrica.org/search?query=suicide&source=HomePage>

¹⁹ <https://data.who.int/countries/454>

²⁰ <https://www.suicide-decrim.network/countries/malawi>

²¹ <https://www.thesparklefoundation.org/breaking-the-silence-addressing-the-rising-suicide-rates-in-malawi>

<https://times.mw/suicide-cases-worsen/>

²² “Who. Live life”, p. 22.

²³ “Who. Live life”, p. 14.

²⁴ Which had one the world’s highest rate. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/9/10/from-ghana-to-guyana-hope-mounts-in-fight-against-suicide-criminalisation>

²⁵ Same article and numerous other press accounts.

²⁶ <https://time.com/6290858/malaysia-suicide-decriminalization-mental-health/>