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Irish Rule of Law
International

Call for Papers: Conference on Criminal Justice System Reform

9th August 2024

Location: Bingu International Conference Centre (BICC)

Submission Deadline: 30th August 2024

Notification of Acceptance: 18th September 2024

Conference Date: 8th and 9th October 2024

1. Conference Description:

The justice system in Malawi is currently facing critical challenges, including but not limited to; a lack of adequate resources and personnel within institutions in the Criminal Justice Systems; inadequate case-management procedures; overcrowding in prisons; limited recourse to non-custodial alternatives; high costs associated with conducting homicide trials; the prevalence of corruption; and a shortage of judicial officers. These systemic problems have led to suspects spending lengthy periods of time in custody often exceeding lawful pre-trial custody time limits.

In addition, victims of crime often have to wait years for justice and a resolution to their cases. According to the most recent Prison Inspectorate Report from 2023, prison overcapacity in Malawi stands at 278%. This marks an exponential increase in the overall prison population which has almost doubled from 9,220 since 2004 to 17,450 (76% convicted and 24% awaiting trial). The conference will bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including government officials, legal practitioners, civil society, academia and international partners. This conference aims to create a holistic approach to criminal justice reform in Malawi. This will be accomplished by addressing not only non-adherence to pre-trial custody time limits but also alternative justice, rehabilitation and reintegration.



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2. Conference Objectives:

- 2.1 Identify challenges and gaps in the current legal framework and practices regarding pre-trial detention in Malawi including sharing best practices and lessons learned from other jurisdictions on implementing effective pre-trial custody time limits.
- 2.2 Explore strategies for reforming the justice system to ensure timely and fair trials while upholding human rights standards.
- 2.3 Foster dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders to develop actionable recommendations for policy reform and sustainable implementation.
- 2.4 Examining current practices in investigation, arrest and court appearances whilst ensuring due process.
- 2.5 Exploring diversion programs in alternative to incarceration.
- 2.6 Develop key set of recommendations for reforming the criminal justice system.

3. Topics of Interest:

We invite papers that provide practical insights or recommendations for improving the criminal justice system in Malawi, specific to the following topics:

- 3.1 **Legal and Human Rights Framework:** The role of international human rights norms in shaping Malawi's criminal justice policies. This should include comparative analysis of Malawian criminal justice system with other jurisdictions.
- 3.2 **Pre-trial detention systemic factors, process and practice:** Examine the factors contributing to prolonged pre-trial detention. Further, examine how effectively due process rights upheld during criminal investigations and trials in Malawi?
- 3.3 **Prison Conditions and Rehabilitation:** Assess the impact of extended pre-trial detention on prison conditions and inmate welfare, including the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in reducing recidivism.
- 3.4 **Court System:** Explore the impact of case backlog on justice delivery and the role of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in reducing court congestion.
- 3.5 **Role of Stakeholders:** Discuss the responsibilities of various actors, including the judiciary, law enforcement, legal aid organizations, and civil society, in addressing issues within the criminal justice system. This should include the role that technology plays in improving access to justice.



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3.6 Corruption within the Criminal Justice System: The impact of corruption on the fairness of criminal trials. Strategies to combat corruption in law enforcement and the judiciary and public perceptions of corruption within the criminal justice system.

3.7 Gender and the Criminal Justice System: The handling of gender-based violence cases by the criminal justice system. The role of the judiciary in protecting women's rights including gender biases within law enforcement and judicial processes.

3.8 Reforms: The need for reforms in specific areas of criminal law (e.g., sentencing, bail etc) and the impact of legal reforms on crime rates and justice delivery.

4. Submission Guidelines

4.1 Authors, whose abstracts have been accepted, will be required to submit full papers not exceeding 4,000 – 6,000 words, including references and appendices.

4.2 Abstract and full papers should be in Word or PDF format, using 12-point Times New Roman font, 1.5 spacing, with 1-inch margins.

4.3 Abstracts and full papers should be submitted to conference@irishruleoflaw.ie

5. Important Dates:

5.1 Submission Deadline for Abstracts: 30th August 2024

5.2 Notification of Acceptance: 18th September 2024

5.3 Conference Dates: 8th and 9th October 2024.

6. Publication Opportunity:

Selected papers will be considered for publication in a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal, or an edited volume focused on justice reform and human rights.

7. Contact Information:

For further details and inquiries, please write to: conference@irishruleoflaw.ie