



INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH CONFERENCE

RELIGION, LAW AND PUBLIC HEALTH: TOWARDS A GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE HUMAN CAPITAL

TIMELINE

- The deadline for the submission of abstracts is **16th April 2024**.
- Notification of abstract decisions by **28th June 2024**.
- Paper submission by **30th August 2024**.
- Conference will take place on **19th September 2024**.

The University of Malawi intends to host a Conference on the intersection of religion, law and public health in Africa. The aim of the Conference is to examine religious, cultural and legal philosophies and practical policy-programmatic issues that influence health-seeking behaviours and their impact on public health, which is key to Human Capital Development. Specifically, the Conference examines the social determinants of health and their implications for public policy programs focused on the interface of law, faith and health. This event will attract legal, faith-based and health experts, analysts, and practitioners in academia, think tanks, research, public service, and policy space in the country's development plain field.

RATIONALE AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE CONFERENCE

Research shows that there are strong connections between religion, law, and public health. Religious beliefs influence health behaviour, as they foster or deter personal and community activities relating to and impacting health. Human activities are undertaken within the sanctity of what is permissible or not, guided by an agreed code of sanctioned behaviour and activities. Historically, religious groups laid the groundwork for public health service design and service provision, which would later develop into a structured approach to the provision of public health services through hospitals and medical training as early as the Middle Ages. In the 19th century, medical missionaries were employed in Africa as tools for evangelizing and promoting scientific knowledge. Moreover, the Church and faith-based organizations play critical roles in health services in Africa. The law regulates human affairs in society, including religion and public health issues. In recent years, human rights law has dominated the discussion of religion and public health.

Nevertheless, the relationships among religion, public health and law are marked by disagreements and controversies that deter optimal utilization of health and well-being. In contemporary times, religion has been pushed out of the realm of public health, inspired by secularism and modernity. However, the foundation and premise of the role of health in religion cannot be disputed, although it is now relegated to historical reference rather than to effective public health policy, program design and service provision. The COVID-19 outbreak of the

past three years has shed light on the intricate web of connections between religion, public health, and law, as during this pandemic, the law was used as a medium for resolving conflicts and disagreements between religious freedom advocates and the promotion of public health. However, the law has historically had instances of conflict with the expression of religious freedoms and public health practices.

Public health has a pivotal place in Africa's human capital development toward transforming the continent toward sustainable economic development, as outlined in Agenda 2030. For Malawi, unpacking the confluence of law, faith and public health is key to the country's new vision toward building globally competitive human capital that would deliver the lower middle-income milestone toward 2030 and indeed the vision of an inclusively wealthy and self-reliant nation by 2063. Public health is one of the main vehicles through which a country's human capital could be enhanced, and examining how it interfaces with key elements of governance, law and faith to deliver effective services for Malawi's human capital is crucial.

The goal of this Conference is to provide space for unpacking and examining theoretical and practical aspects of the confluence of law, faith and public health through the lens of the latest points of conflict, as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cholera outbreak. Furthermore, the conference seeks to create an awareness that human beings are rational and that their decision-making regarding health-seeking behaviours is influenced by their religious and cultural beliefs as well as the law and the environment in which they live. We hope that the Conference will stimulate discussion about the need to design health systems that consider that human beings are psychosomatic entities. This is essential if public health is to achieve its ideal of promoting the general good without losing sight of the need to treat each person as an individual.

We, therefore, encourage submissions of papers that take a transdisciplinary approach to the interconnectedness of these broad areas and public health in Africa. The papers should respond to the following thematic areas:

- African Traditional Religions and Public Health
- Religion and health care in pluralist societies

- Marginality, healthcare disparities and implications for human capital development
- Religious Freedom and Ethics in Health Care
- Faith healing and rituals versus public health
- Law, mental health/illness and religion
- Religion and Public Health: Legal and Policy Frameworks
- Religious freedom and the rule of law
- Divergence of law and faith
- Indigenous knowledge systems, customary law and public health
- Religion, the environment and public health

SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

Scholars and researchers are invited to submit a 300-word abstract. Authors should also submit a title page indicating the title of the proposed paper, author(s), affiliation and corresponding author's email address. Authors of accepted proposals will be notified and sent paper guidelines. All submitted abstracts will be double-blind and peer reviewed.

Please send your abstracts (word format only) through email to religionhealthlaw@unima.ac.mw copied to Dr Dorothy Tembo at dtembo@unima.ac.mw

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CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS

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