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**Rauchzeichen!**



**Kampagne gegen Ausbeutung und Umweltzerstörung durch Tabakkonzerne**

**www.unfairtobacco.org**

Press Release - 17 APRIL 2009

**Slavery on Malawian tobacco estates  
German NGO delivers petition against exploitation of tobacco workers to Malawian government**

On Friday, 17 April 2009, the Germany based NGO Blue 21 delivered the petition for tobacco workers' rights to representatives of the Government of Malawi in Lilongwe. The petition calls upon the Malawian government to abolish the debt bondage system which is called "Tenancy Labour" and give basic rights to tobacco workers and tenants. The petition was initiated by Blue 21 and the Tobacco Tenants and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (TOTAWUM) and supported by several Malawian organisations.

The south-east African country of Malawi derives about 70% of its foreign exchange earnings from tobacco. Malawian leaf is found in most of the major tobacco brands. Surveys and reports by Malawian organisation and international scientists show: The about 500,000 tobacco tenants in the country usually don't have written labour contracts, and little or no access to basic necessities like safe drinking water, adequate housing and sufficient food. "What we find on tobacco estates can only be described by the term 'modern slavery'" reports the speaker of Blue 21 about her impressions from visits on several farms.

Representatives of Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Agriculture as well as TOTAWUM, the Centre for Social Concern and Malawian anti-tobacco organisations attended the press conference for the delivery of the petition. Two tenants from Finance Minister Goodall Gondwe's Zanzi Estate in Mitundo gave their testimonies.

The representative of the Ministry of Labour, Mr Ordrige Khunga commented: "As of now, what we can tell you is that the Bill is with Ministry of Justice."

The representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr Gray Nyandule Phiri, demanded that the side of the landlords should also be heard. Father Jos Kuppens, Director of the Centre for Social Concern, responded to that remark: "We have come here, I think, specifically to look at the tenants. We have invited TAMA and I don't think they're here today. And TAMA is supposed to represent them. Now, we cannot drag them in."

"Although the petition was addressed to the Ministry of Justice and although Blue 21 as well as the Malawian partner organisation Centre for Social Concern approached the Ministry several weeks before the delivery to find a date that is convenient for them, they excused themselves just a few minutes before the press conference was supposed to start: The responsible officer is tied in another meeting. The ministries pass on the buck to one another. The Ministry of Justice told us in a telephone call that the responsibility is not with them but with the Ministry of Labour. This, in addition to the absence of the essential Ministry shows: Obviously, there is no political will to pass the Tenancy Labour Bill!" explained Laura Graen, speaker of Blue 21.

The petition delivery is part of a bigger project which is conducted by the Malawian organisation Centre for Social Concern (CFSC). In the middle of the campaigning time for the General Elections

in May 2009, the Lilongwe based Centre puts pressure on government and politicians and brings the issue into the public. The aim is to make the plight of tenants a campaign issue and press for the passing of the Bill after the elections. The project was started with a CSO conference on 16/17 March to build a network. Other activities were field trips with journalists to estates. The Centre also anticipates demonstrations in May.

On the website of the tobacco project of Blue 21 you find:  
(<http://www.unfairtobacco.org/index.php?id=media>):

- the full text of the petition
- the statement of Blue 21
- pictures from tobacco estates in high resolution
- further background information

High quality audio recordings of the press conference and testimonies of tenants can be made available upon request.

With any questions, please don't hesitate to call or email Laura Graen, speaker of Blue 21:

Mail: [laura-urgent@unfairtobacco.org](mailto:laura-urgent@unfairtobacco.org)

Phone: 00265 - 9999 58 697 (until 19 APRIL, 10:30 am) // 0049 - 1577 - 259 22 47 (from 20 APRIL, 1 pm)

#### **Background information of the supporting organisations:**

**Blue 21** is the Berlin Working Group on Environment and Development and was founded in 1995 with the aim to serve low-income countries by lobbying for their issues in Germany and Europe. Since then, the organisation is lobbying for debt relief for developing countries, for fair world market systems and for sustainable development. It scrutinizes Western development assistance policies (like IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes) for their possible negative impacts on countries in which they are implemented.

In 2004, Blue 21 initiated the campaign "Rauchzeichen!" ("smoke signal") with the aim to raise awareness on exploitation of farmers and workers by tobacco companies and destruction of environment in tobacco growing regions.

**The Tobacco Tenants and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (TOTAWUM)** is representing the tobacco tenants and workers in Malawi. It was officially registered in 1998 and represent about 21,000 tenants.

The **Centre for Social Concern (CFSC)** was founded in 2001 as a project of Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers). It is a faith-based organization that promotes research and action on social issues, linking the Christian faith with social justice. Since its establishment, it has been involved in matters related to the plight of the workers on the tobacco estates.

The organisations **Drug Fight Malawi**, **Link for Education and Governance (LEG)** and **Youth Alliance in Social and Economic Development (YASED)** are the major tobacco control advocates in Malawi. By supporting the petition and witnessing its delivery, they showed their solidarity with the tenants and workers.