Malawi protesters demand inquiry into allegations of rape by police officers

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<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/oct/25/malawi-protesters-demand-inquiry-into-allegations-of-by-police-officers>

Hundreds of rights campaigners have taken to the streets of Malawi’s capital to call for a government investigation into allegations of rape by police officers during ongoing post-election violence.

The EU ambassador to Malawi [condemned](https://twitter.com/SandraPaesenEU/status/1185595985835253760) the alleged sexual violence and called for “light to be shed on what happened.” The British high commissioner also reportedly [called for a thorough investigation](https://www.nyasatimes.com/british-envoy-decries-malawi-police-sexual-exploitation-at-nsundwe/).

Earlier this month demonstrators set up roadblocks in the capital, which led to the deployment of the police. In the pandemonium that followed, a police officer was killed. Security officers stormed the area the following day, spraying [teargas](https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-malawi-politics/malawi-police-use-tear-gas-as-opposition-protests-grow-idUKKCN1T722B) and attacking the public.

The NGO Gender Coordination Network (NGO-GCN) documented accounts from women and girls who said they had been sexually assaulted by police officers.

“While NGO-GCN advocate justice on the case [the killing of the police officer], the network is disturbed with reports that some of the police officers dispatched in the area … raped women, defiled self-boarding girl students, tortured people and looted private property,” read its report.

The report, which described how police officers threw teargas and broke into houses, demanded that the president and other authorities ensure the allegations were thoroughly investigated and perpetrators punished. “ No one is above the law and the rule of law must be respected,” said the report.

Dressed mostly in black, the protesters chanted angry songs while carrying placards with slogans that included: “No excuses for sexual harassment”, “It never occurred to me that I would never be safe at the hands of police”, and “Police: raping, undressing and beating us, what wrong have us women committed”.

Emma Kaliya, a women’s rights campaigner who led the protests, described the conduct as the “worst kind of gender-based violence”.

“We are sending a message that they need to act with speed. If they find, in their investigation, that this is true, then the perpetrators should be punished just like any other person,” she told reporters.

Sandra Paesen, the EU ambassador to [Malawi](https://www.theguardian.com/world/malawi), who also attended the protests, said: “We want an investigation [and] we don’t want any violence against women in this country or any other country.”

Last Wednesday, the British high commissioner to Malawi, Holly Tett, described the allegations as “disturbing” and said: “The UK believes that the best way to restore the police and public trust is through a thorough investigation.”

The ministry of gender in the country declined to comment on the protests when contacted, but earlier issued a press statement condemning the alleged abuses.

“The ministry is deeply concerned by these allegations that border on disregard for women’s rights and exploitation of their vulnerability,” said the statement.