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## BEATING PLASTIC POLLUTION IN MALAWI

Planet Earth is in the grip of a global crisis. Across the world, plastic waste is spoiling oceans, destroying landscapes, killing animals and putting human lives at risk. Malawi is no exception. Estimates indicate that a staggering 75,000 tonnes of plastic is produced in Malawi each year, of which 80% is single-use plastic that cannot be recycled.<sup>1</sup> The social, environmental and economic costs of plastic pollution are vast, resulting in damage to soil, water and food production, increased risk of floods, costs to human health and losses in tourism revenue.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking at the last World Environment Day, United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, noted that there are now more plastic particles polluting the planet than there are stars in our galaxy. “Our world is swamped by harmful plastic waste,” he stated. “Every year, more than eight million tonnes end up in our environment.”

Public opinion in Malawi supports efforts to protect people and the environment, with results from a recent survey showing that 95% of people believe that plastic pollution is a serious issue in Malawi, with 94% of people supporting a ban on thin plastics.<sup>3</sup>

“Action starts at home, and speaks louder than words,” the UN Secretary-General said. “The United Nations aims to lead by example, and more than 30 of our agencies have now begun working to end the use of single-use plastic.”

Right now there is a chance to make a real difference. On 16 April the Supreme Court will decide whether to reaffirm a national ban on the production and use of thin plastics - a ban that was first introduced by the Government in 2014. We congratulate the Government for its resolve in passing the ban and look forward to the outcome of the hearing which will determine whether Malawi joins the growing movement across Africa against plastic pollution.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Addressing Plastic Pollution in Malawi: Review and Recommendations*, April 2019. Report commissioned by UNDP, Lilongwe Wildlife Trust and Environmental Affairs Department. Available upon request.

<sup>2</sup> *Single-Use Plastics: A Roadmap for Sustainability*, June 2018, UNEP; *Plastic & Health: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet*, February 2019, Center for International Environmental Law, Earthworks, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, Healthy Babies Bright Futures (HBBF), IPEN, Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (t.e.j.a.s.), University of Exeter, and UPSTREAM.

<sup>3</sup> Survey conducted by Lilongwe Wildlife Trust, April 2019 (1,554 respondents as of Monday 8 April).

<sup>4</sup> More than 25 countries in Africa, including Cameroon, Egypt, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Botswana and Ethiopia have passed, or are about to pass, legislation banning the production and distribution of single-use plastics.