

# Malawi: Chakwera Slammed for Pardoning Chinese Wildlife Kingpins - 'A Betrayal of Malawi's Conservation Fight'

President Lazarus Chakwera is facing a torrent of criticism after controversially pardoning two convicted Chinese wildlife traffickers, in what civil society leaders and environmentalists have branded a shameful betrayal of Malawi's fight against corruption, wildlife crime, and executive accountability.

The decision to release Lin Yunhua and his wife Qin Hua Zhang--key players in a notorious wildlife trafficking syndicate that operated across southern Africa--has sparked public outrage, with many calling the pardon not just a misjudgment, but a dangerous endorsement of international environmental crime.

"This is a slap in the face to every ranger, prosecutor, and conservationist who risked life and limb to bring these criminals to justice," said Reverend Macbowman Mulagha, chairperson of the Natural Resources Justice Network, a coalition of 45 civil society organisations. "Chakwera has undone years of progress in one stroke."

The group's statement, dated July 5, slammed the pardon as one that "sets a reckless precedent that environmental criminals can negotiate the execution of justice in Malawi." It warned that the decision undermines the country's National Parks and Wildlife Act, as well as international obligations under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Lin and Zhang were sentenced in 2021 and 2020 respectively, after being caught red-handed with elephant ivory, rhino horn, and hippo teeth--wildlife parts linked to decades of poaching and species decline. Lin remains in custody pending corruption charges, while Zhang has reportedly already fled the country.

The revelations have triggered renewed calls for transparency in the presidential pardon process, especially after The Nation exposed in April how authorities quietly pardoned 21 inmates without public disclosure during Easter.

Michael Kaiyatsa of the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation warned: "We need a legal obligation to publish pardon reports. Without that, the President risks turning the pardon process into a cloak-and-dagger tool of political convenience."

Despite government claims that only reformed inmates are considered for pardon, critics say the system is riddled with selective justice, favouring those with money, influence or foreign ties.

"This is not about reform. This is about connections. The average Malawian rots in overcrowded jails, while high-profile foreign convicts walk free under the cover of national celebrations," said one prominent activist who declined to be named for fear of reprisals.

Inmates across Malawi's overflowing prisons, currently housing 16,000 against a capacity of 8,000, watched in disbelief as their peers--some reportedly admitted to public universities--were excluded from the latest Independence Day pardon while the infamous traffickers were quietly released.

Victor Mhango of CHREAA said the system is rigged: "This is no longer a justice process. This is executive favouritism parading as mercy."

Observers are now questioning Chakwera's political will on governance reforms, with some calling the incident a litmus test of his presidency.

"The people trusted him to be different," said political analyst Makhumbo Munthali. "But what we are seeing is a deeply worrying pattern of executive overreach, impunity, and elite protectionism."

As the backlash grows, many are now demanding not only the reversal of the pardon, but also an independent review of all previous pardons issued under Chakwera's watch.

"The President must not just explain this decision--he must correct it," said Mulagha. "If not, then history will remember him as the man who chose criminals over conservation."

What do you think about Chakwera's decision to pardon convicted wildlife traffickers? Join the conversation on social media using #PardonGate #SaveMalawiWildlife.