

# Zomba youths unite for inter-faith marriages

by Justice Mponda

YOUTHS from different religious groupings in Zomba have ganged up to persuade their churches to put in place firm structures that would encourage and promote inter-faith marriages and co-existence.

They said gone were the days when churches used to restrict their members to marry partners of their choices due to religious differences.

The youths said this at the launch of Inter-Faith Community Co-existence among Youth project in the district, which is being implemented by Tipindule Community Youth Organisation (Ticoyo) with financial support from United Nation Alliance Civilisation Youth Solidarity Fund.

"It has come to our concern that when a young Moslem or Christian man tries to marry a woman from another religion, leaders of both religions, including parents, will say bad things about the other religion while discouraging their children from getting married to partners of their choice.

"There is also some animosity between the religious groups when they interact socially because parents restrict their children from mix-



**MUSLIMS**—They should marry Christians if they want

ing with those from other religions for fear of being lured into joining them. This creates conflict in form of name calling, stigma and in extreme cases, discrimination among young people of different religions," said the group's project coordinator Violet Nkupata.

Reacting to the plea, Sheikh Kasimu Bunaya, who is a Zomba district coordinator for Africa Development Education Foundation (Adef), appreciated the youths' con-

cern, saying they would put their plea on the roundtable.

"We were all created in the image of God, so we believe that there is no need for that restriction. However, the first thing is that, as future leaders, youths should start tolerating each other on one's religious beliefs and knowledge. I would be waiting for a day when I would see a Moslem youth reading a Bible and a Christian youth reading Qur'an," he said.

The sheikh said he was very con-

fidant the project would make a difference in the way people perceive and treat each other on religious grounds through get together meetings, Bible classes, madras and area development committees.

"Through this programme, we want to see changes in people's mindsets about religious and cultural co-existence. We want to see young people respecting each other's religious, social and cultural rights," he said.

Bishop Richard Kasenda of Kingsway International Christian Church (KICC) urged the line authorities to put Bible Knowledge and Islamic Teachings as compulsory subjects at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

According to a research conducted by Ticoyo, 65 percent of Malawians are Christians.

Due to this, most Muslims are segregated in form of school participation, development work, marriage issues and decision making in communities.

The research observed that the problem of poor school participation among Muslims youths is increasing because they are being mocked by their fellow young people and this forces them to drop out of school.

Since they are limited in terms of literacy and numerical skills, it becomes difficult for them to actively participate in development structures.

"For instance, important periods for the Moslem youths such as Ramadan are not considered by other non-Moslem youths and this breeds conflict between the two groups as Moslems feel they are not being respected by other community members," said Ticoyo's director of programmes Louis M'bwana.