



**SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY MRS. JOYCE BANDA**

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
MALAWI**

**ON**

**THE OFFICIAL OPENING  
OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHILD  
LABOUR**

**IN MALAWI,**

**ON**

**TUESDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER 2012**

**AT**

**CRESTA HOTEL,**

**LILONGWE**

- The Vice President of the Republic of Malawi and Minister of Health, Right Honourable Khumbo Kachali
- The Minister of Labour, Honourable Eunice Makangala M.P
- And All Cabinet Ministers present here
- The Chief Secretary to the Government Mr. Bright Msaka, SC
- Hon. Edwin Bhagwanji, Member of Parliament for Lilongwe City West
- And all Members of Parliament present here
- The Director of International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour

- The President of the Elimination of Child Labour in Tobacco Foundation (ECLT)
- The President of Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) Mr. Luther Mambala
- The President of Employers Consultative Association of Malawi (ECAM) Mr. Buxton Kayuni
- The Acting Chief Executive for Lilongwe City Assembly, Mr. Victor Mulula
- The District Commissioner for Lilongwe Mr. Paul Kalilombe
- All children present here

- Distinguished Participants
- Ladies and gentlemen

I am happy to be here today to perform the official opening of the National Conference on Child Labour in Agriculture in Malawi under the theme: End Child Labour in Agriculture: Our Children: Our Future.

First of all, I would like to extend a warm welcome to invited delegates to the National Conference who have travelled from different countries and to all others who have come to join us on this occasion: welcome to the warm heart of Africa. I am pleased to see the ILO's tripartite representation: participants from government, employers' and workers' organizations.

## **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The issue of child labour is a very emotional issue. Being a mother myself, this conference is only cementing my strong political commitment to the goal of eliminating child labour in Malawi.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali former United Nations Secretary-General said, " Child labour is a controversial and emotional issue. It is also a complex and challenging one that defies simple solutions. The thoughtful and comprehensive approaches required must be guided by the best interests of the child and by a commitment to children's human rights, as enshrined in the "Convention on the Rights of the Child."

To some business, child labour provides cheap labour and therefore it enhances his profits. To some families, child labour is an income generating venture. And as Government, child

labour is a robber of skilled labour force and an abuser of child rights. And yet to some cultures, child labour is a trying ground for a child to acquire skills at a very young age.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

My Government fully supports the initiatives undertaken to organize this conference which I am reliably informed to include:

- 1) Exchanging and sharing good practices on the elimination of child labour in agriculture;
- 2) Sharing and adopting or endorsing prioritized actions to better integrate child labour in agriculture in Malawi in the context of the National Action Plan; and
- 3) Contributing to a roadmap, with specific commitments, responsibilities and concrete actions and milestones for the

implementation and realization of the agriculture component of the Child Labour National Action Plan for Malawi by 2016.

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS II) that my Government approved few months ago put child labour elimination as a priority area and the Malawi Decent Work Country Programme (MDWCP) supports the implementation of child labour initiatives by Ministry of Labour and its social partners. The Hague Global Child Labour Conference (2010) Road Map points out that child labour is not a phenomenon that can be addressed in isolation, and that the elimination of child labour is also key to achieving many development goals.

## **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This conference demonstrates the growing national and international concern about the problem of child labour in our country and globally. This meeting therefore is a proof of our common will to contribute to the long-term goal of eliminating child labour.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that some 165 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are involved in child labour. Many of these children work long hours, often in dangerous conditions. In Malawi, out of the 1.4 million children engaged in child labour in 2002, 52% or 735,000 were in agriculture, which is by far the largest single sector involving child labour. The first child labour survey undertaken in the country in 2002 showed that child labour prevalence rate was at 37% while the Multiple Indicators Cluster

Survey undertaken by The National Statistics Office in 2006 showed that child labour prevalence rate was at 29%. There was a reduction of 8%. This was due to a number of interventions that were carried out. I am sure any study that can be carried now will show different results and with a lower percentage. Progress in eliminating child labour in agriculture has been slow due to traditions that allow children to participate in agricultural activities from a young age, making the problem difficult to address.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In Malawi, agriculture is the backbone of the economy, providing livelihood for 80% of Malawians and forming important complementarities between production of cash and food crops. This alone makes agriculture by far the most important economic activity in

the country. The Government of Malawi recognizes that agriculture needs to become a priority area in child labour elimination at national and sectoral levels. To be sustainable agricultural and rural development cannot be based on the exploitation of children but, it should aim to create decent work opportunities.

The Malawi Government fully recognizes the far-reaching adverse impact of child labour on children, the society and the economy in general. Child labour does not only deprive the children of their right to proper development and education, but also of their future ability to sustain themselves and to participate actively in the development of their country.

In the short term, the society suffers from the social ills of juvenile delinquency and the economy is robbed of a skilled and healthy

labour force to drive its economic and social progress. There can never be a win-win situation when child labour is condoned.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Children have the right to grow in an environment that protects them. Successful protection increases physical and mental health, confidence and self-respect and is less likely to abuse or exploit others, including their own. Children have rights and must be afforded their opportunity to recreation and play and to engage in sport and cultural activities rather than be subjected to violence and exploitation. Where they experience work, it should be positive contribution to the family and community that increases their own self-respect and sense of empowerment and contributes to their learning rather than distract them from it.

## **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

The government of Malawi has demonstrated its political commitment towards elimination of child labour through ratification of various international instruments relating to child labour namely;

- i) ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age of Admission into Employment,
- ii) ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and
- iii) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Malawi is also a signatory to the SADC Charter on Fundamental Social Rights and, by virtue of its membership, is party to the SADC Code of Conduct on Child Labour. The provisions of these instruments have been domesticated in the national laws including the Malawi Constitution, the Employment Act, The Child

Justice, Care and Protection Act and the proposed Tenancy Labour Bill.

The Malawi Constitution protects a child under the age of 16 from economic exploitation and work that is likely to be hazardous, interfere with education or that is harmful to their health, physical, mental and spiritual or social development. The Employment Act prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 in any undertaking and the National Code of Conduct on Child Labour outlines guiding principles of various stakeholders in the fight against child labour.

We have gazetted the List of Hazardous work for children in Malawi which outlines the various sectors prohibited for children between the ages of 14 and 18 to work in.

All these instruments are designed to protect children from labour exploitation and work towards elimination of child labour.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Malawi Government in partnership with the ILO carried out a national survey to determine the state of child labour in the country. This was followed by a programme supported by the ILO to combat child labour in tobacco plantations. Since then other organizations like the United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF), Plan Malawi and other international and local NGOs have taken interest in Child labour and significant inroads have been made towards its elimination.

The free education programme has also played a significant role in militating against child labour. There is, however, need to mainstream

child labour issues in all development activities to ensure that all the gains that have been made so far do not get eroded.

**Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,**

In order to effectively eliminate child labour, my Government has developed the National Action Plan (NAP) on child labour. The NAP provides direction for progressive elimination of child labour from 2010 to 2016. It is guided by the Global Action Plan on Child Labour, and will among other objectives ensure mainstreaming child labour in the national economic and social development framework. This comprehensive National Action Plan provides such needed priority and operational framework for action on child labour in Malawi. It also provides a coherent framework and sense of direction for the various actors in the field and the Ministry of Labour coordinates its implementation.

Child Labour, however, requires a multidisciplinary approach. Therefore various government departments, employers and workers organizations and NGOs are being called upon to play a part in providing various services required to fulfill its implementation. Furthermore, for the NAP to become a reality there is need to mobilize the required resources for its implementation from both internal and external sources. My government is committed within the resources available to support child labour elimination programmes, but we need more resources to cover comprehensive interventions on prevention, withdrawal, rehabilitation and reintegration.

## **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

A number of gaps have been identified which pose challenges to effectively implement measures to combat child labour in Malawi.

In the education sector, we have inadequate numbers of teachers, lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials and lack of proper facilities such as water and sanitation facilities, and these factors have negatively influenced the attendance and retention of children in schools. These factors tend to force children out of school, which makes them prone to child labour.

Children withdrawn or prevented from child labour have in many cases found it difficult to be absorbed in existing schools. School feeding programmes being implemented by the World Food Program and other stakeholders have proven to be an effective means of attracting

and retaining children in school. At the moment however the programmes are limited to a few pilot areas and schools. There is need to roll out these programmes to other areas and schools in the country, particularly in times of food shortage.

There is inadequate information on child labour situation in the country. The last comprehensive survey was undertaken in 2002 and so far no follow up comprehensive child labour survey has been done. Despite various child labour programmes being implemented in a number of districts in the country, the assessment of the impact of these programs on the magnitude and trends is yet to be known due to unavailability of current statistics. It is the desire of my Government to conduct a comprehensive child labour survey to assess the current trends and magnitude for proper evaluation of impact

of programs implemented for proper policy development and interventions.

### **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

Studies have proven that poverty at household level is one of the major contributing factors to child labour in Malawi. The income and food poverty in households lure children into labour. There is thus a need to link child labour initiatives to national growth and poverty alleviation strategies to ensure household income and food security.

In the short and medium term, my Government is providing safety nets and other social protection interventions both as preventive and alternative measures of dealing with child labour.

Working children (14 – 17 years) are usually exposed to hazards in their workplace. In many estates and smallholder farms, employers do not have conducive working conditions for their employees. In most cases, employees and their children have limited access to essential services such as health and education. We believe the gazetting of the list of hazardous work for children will address such problems. I urge the Labour Officials to intensify labour inspections and monitoring and Traditional Chiefs, Political Leaders, Non-Governmental Organizations to be vigilant and ensure that no child is subjected to hazardous working conditions.

I am aware that cultural factors in some districts also contribute to high rates of child labour. For instance, in some areas, children are assumed old enough to cater for themselves upon

undergoing traditional initiation rites. Such children often drop out of school and look for employment where they are exposed to different worst forms of child labour. Others tend to get married early. Other cultural practices expose parents to HIV and subsequently exacerbate the vulnerability of children to child labour. I therefore request our traditional leaders to identify cultures and traditions that do not promote child labour and preserve them but do away with those that contribute towards child labour.

Poor collaboration and networking in the implementation of child labour programmes is another major challenge. It has been found that most stakeholders often work in isolation due to differences in priorities and the need to maintain their identities. This has unfortunately resulted in duplication of efforts, underserved

areas and subsequently resource wastage. In order to effectively eliminate child labour there is need for promoting multi sectoral collaboration.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am delighted that a number of development partners have already started helping my government in implementing various programmes in different parts of the country. For example,

- i) The Elimination of Child Labour in Tobacco Foundation (ECLT) is supporting Save the Children in Implementing the Child Labour Elimination Action for Real Change (CLEAR) project which aims at contributing to the elimination of hazardous child labour in the tobacco sector.

- ii) ILO/Integrated Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) with funding from U.S. Department for Labour have supported the national action plan to combat child labour in Malawi (SNAP Malawi) project aiming at developing effective strategies to combat child labour and Integrate child labour issues into social, economic and developmental policies.
  
- iii) The Japanese International Tobacco who also have funded the programme called Achieving Reduction of Child Labour in supporting Education (ARISE) which aims at reducing child labour through improvements in education, opportunity and awareness and economic

empowerment for tobacco growing communities.

- iv) UNICEF for the strengthening the fight against child labour project which aimed at institutional development framework, enforcement, awareness, social mobilization education protection and rehabilitation.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is our duty to educate our children about their rights and about child labour. Children need to know their rights and dangers and risks of work to their health, safety and education. They need to learn to protect themselves and to have information about their rights, which laws exist specially for their protection, and to whom they can turn for help when they are at risk of being exploited. Educating children on rights teaches

them about their responsibilities to themselves and to others. This helps them become productive citizens of their communities when receiving adequate care and protection. An important target for information should be children. Well informed children are often their own best advocates. Children need information about the exploitative realities of child labour, especially children from areas and groups most likely to feed the child labour market.

### **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

Education for a child is the first step towards obtaining decent work and a decent livelihood as an adult. Research has proven that educating girls is one of the most effective ways of tackling poverty. Educated girls are more likely to have better income as adults, marry later, have fewer and healthier children, and to

have decision making power within the household.

They are also more likely to ensure that their own children are educated, helping to avoid future child labour. Tackling child labour among girls and promoting their right to education, is therefore an important element of broader strategies to promote development and decent work. The right to free education, at least at the primary or basic level, is enshrined in international human rights law, and through the Millennium Development Goals, there is urgent need to develop innovative programmes that can support and keep girls through their secondary education. This is the surest way of fighting child labour sustainably.

## **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

In closing, I wish to acknowledge the financial support and technical assistance of the ECLT Foundation, ILO/IPEC and all those who have contributed to the realisation of this conference.

On this note, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I declare “the National Conference on Child Labour in Malawi” officially opened.

I thank you all for your attention.

**May God bless us all and the children of Malawi.**