

## **Conference on Child Labour and Agriculture in Malawi**

**4-6 September, 2012, Lilongwe, Malawi**

### **Opening Remarks**

**Martin Clemensson**

**Director, ILO Country Office for Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique**

- Your Excellency Mrs. Joyce Banda, The President of the Republic of Malawi
- Hon Eunice Makangala, MP, Minister of Labour
- Hon Eunice Kazembe, MP, Minister of Education, Science and Technology
- Hon Prof. Peter Mwanza, MP, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security
- Hon Anita Kalinde, MP, Minister of Gender and Child Affairs
- Hon John Bande, MP, Minister of Trade and Private Sector Development
- Mr Luther Mambala, President of the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions
- Mr Buxton Kayuni, President of the Employers Consultative Association of Malawi
- Ms. Barbara Martellini, Vice President of the ECLT Foundation
- Ms. Lisa Vickers, Charge d’Affaire of the United States Embassy, Lilongwe
- Distinguished Participants

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I am honoured to represent the ILO at this landmark conference and to share a platform with President Banda, a leader of international standing in promoting labour rights. Your presence today is a demonstration of Malawi’s unshakeable commitment to the elimination of child labour. I would also like to thank the Conference organizers, the ECLT Foundation and the Tripartite Task Force. The ILO is proud to have been able to provide support to the technical preparations of the conference.

Child labour is one face of poverty. It is an expression of profound deficits of decent work. Decent work for women and men, basic social protection, as well

as access to quality education, is the foundation of stability for families, communities and societies. They are stepping stones to a world free from child labour. It is time for the broad vision and coherent policies that will end child labour.

With the ratification of ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Entry into Employment and ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 1999, Malawi has put in place the normative framework necessary to protect its children from the scourge of child labour.

Also, the Government of Malawi has launched the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS II), which specifically recognises that the elimination of child labour from all sectors is crucial for development of Malawi. I congratulate the Government of Malawi for this focus, which will definitely go a long way in the fight against child labour.

The ILO supports the implementation of the MDGS through its Decent Work Country Programme. And through the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, it has provided technical assistance to Malawi for over a decade to strengthen the capacity

- to tackle the problem,
- to promote the mainstreaming of child labour concerns into national, district and local development policies and plans, and
- to implement demonstration projects in a number of sectors.

We have been privileged to work with our tripartite constituents, - i.e. the Government, the employers' organisation and the workers' organisation –

- to support critical progress in areas such as the development of a National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour,

- the determination of what constitutes hazardous work for children in Malawi and
- the establishment of cost effective models for education and skills training, child labour monitoring systems and institutional development processes at the local and district levels.

We look forward to providing support for further progress in legislation, policies and tripartite sustainable action against child labour.

More attention has to be paid to the root causes of child labour: rural under-development, family poverty and social exclusion, and lack of access to land, services and rights. We cannot relent.

What is at risk is not only the physical, moral and emotional integrity of these children, but also the future of their societies. Work which negatively affects the health and development of children will inevitably affect their employability as youth and later as adults.

It is unacceptable that economic growth and development should allow complacency or resignation about child labour, or that we just don't care about the poorest and the most vulnerable.

***A major question for this conference is: how can we make greater progress in eliminating child labour, especially in agriculture?***

Broadening advocacy, more visibility, and strengthening law and enforcement, certainly play important roles. If we are to remove the 129 million children from child labour in agriculture and protect their siblings from child labour, we need a systemic shift towards social justice in rural economies, higher productivity in crop quality and yields, safer agricultural practices, sustainable food security and better access to decent work.

This means decent incomes, adequate education and social protection for working families and their children in the village and on the farm. Inputs that enable adults to have safe, better and more productive work in agriculture and young people to have decent job opportunities, are indeed key to removing family reliance on child labour.

I firmly believe that workers' organizations offer a stronghold and not yet fully tapped potential in the fight against child labour. Alliances such as the ECLT are critical to future success and an excellent model of a multi-stakeholder initiative, based on social dialogue. We need more such partnerships in agriculture and it is our hope that this conference can provide an impetus to such collaborative action against child labour in other crops in Malawi. And of course much of the success would not have been, and cannot be achieved, without financial support such as that from the US Government.

I hope that the conclusions of this conference will reflect some of the five issues that I have raised, namely:

- 1) the need to ensure that all children below the minimum age of employment are in education and that they are not exposed to hazardous work;
- 2) strengthening workplace safety and health for all, in particular for young workers;
- 3) the interdependence of fundamental rights and the crucial role of social dialogue;
- 4) the need to ensure that rural workers and communities have the services that their families and children need; and
- 5) the need for good laws and systemic change that will dig out the roots of child labour in agriculture - formal and informal.

And may I leave you with a thought - inscribed on the keystone of the first ILO headoffice building – “if you want peace, cultivate and harvest justice”.

All children deserve a future with hope – basic decency and dignity demands it.

And every child deserves that we do everything we can do, to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.