



## PRESS STATEMENT

### CHILDREN'S CONFERENCE ON CHILD LABOUR IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN MALAWI "Anything for us, without us, is against us!"

#### Introduction

The Malawi Government in conjunction with the Elimination of Child Labour in tobacco growing (ECLT) has organised a national conference on child labour which will run from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2012 at Crossroads Hotel, in Lilongwe, Malawi under the theme, "**End child labour in agriculture: Our children our future.**" In line with the same cause, a parallel children's conference on child labour has been organised.

The conference will bring together **40 children** aged between 12 and 18 years from across the country. These children have been drawn from different backgrounds: those that have been withdrawn from child labour, others that are at risk of being involved in child labour and some that are advocates against child labour including child parliamentarians.

#### Background to the Children's Conference

Agriculture forms the backbone of the Malawian economy, and provides livelihood for 80% of the population. It therefore comes as no surprise that 53.3 % of all child labourers in the country are found in the agricultural sector (including farming, forestry, hunting and fishing). This conference therefore comes at a time when a number of research studies carried out have pointed out that children involved in the agricultural sector often work long hours without rest or food, endure inclement weather without appropriate protective gear, some carry heavy loads that affect their growth and health. Some do not have time to go to school as the work interferes with their schooling. Children are taken from source districts in the Southern Region of the country to the destination districts in the Northern and Central Regions and in most cases these children are not given an opportunity to say their views when being taken to work.

#### Objectives of the Conference

It is against this background that a children's conference has been organized to run concurrently with the main conference in order to;

- ✚ Support children to understand and appreciate the aspects of child labour in agriculture, its magnitude and its effects on their lives;
- ✚ Create a platform where children will share local experiences on the status of child labour in their areas and engage in meaningful discussions on how to respond to the challenges;

- ✚ Increase child participation in the fight against child labour in their areas through the development of child-led strategies as a way of implementing Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC);
- ✚ Input into the resolutions and recommendations of the National Child Labour Conference in Agriculture from a child's perspective.

### **Child participation in the Conference**

Child participation has been defined as “children influencing issues affecting their lives, by speaking out or taking action in partnership with adults”. The motivation behind child participation is:

- ✚ The growing emphasis on child rights. Under International law. Children have a substantive and procedural right to be consulted in all decisions concerning their lives;
- ✚ Children know a lot about their own lives.

Globally, children's interests are frequently disregarded in the public policy sphere. Yet public policy impacts directly and indirectly on their lives. Decisions affecting children made without involving them very often have a negative rather than a positive impact on the children.

As a country we believe that given a chance and opportunity, children have the potential to advocate for their own cause. The forum will no doubt offer the children of Malawi space to make meaningful contributions to the fight against the worst forms of child labour in the country.

This children's conference will therefore offer a great opportunity for the country to demonstrate beyond doubt its commitment to true and genuine **Child Participation**. As a country we are convinced that this will go a long way in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Malawi.

Hosting this children's conference will offer us an opportunity, as a country, to lead by example and demonstrate to the outside world that it is possible to have children as active players where issues affecting them like child labour are discussed. It is therefore an initiative that will offer children an opportunity to input into the main child labour conference recommendations.

### **Expected Outcomes for the Children's Conference**

It is expected that the following outcomes would be achieved:

- ✚ Children will have a clear and shared understanding of the various worst forms of Child labour, its magnitude and effects on children's lives.
- ✚ Children will also have shared understanding of their roles in the fight against worst forms of child labour in Malawi.

- ✚ Child-led strategies in the elimination of worst forms of child labour will be developed.
- ✚ Children will have best advocated for issues affecting them in relation to child labour and in return build their advocacy capacity.

The Government of Malawi and NGO partners are therefore calling for all relevant stakeholders and development partners' continued support towards elimination of all worst forms of child labour in the country with full participation of children.

**Wezi Kayira**  
**PRINCIPAL SECRETARY**

