

## **SPEECH**

**BY THE UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE,**

**MS. CARRIE AUER AT THE LAUNCH OF THE FAMILY SUPPORT**

**PACKAGE FOR CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS**

**THYOLO DISTRICT, 20 FEBRUARY 2010**

Madam Callista Chapola-Chimombo,

The Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Henry Chimunthu Banda,

The Minister of Gender, Children and Community Development Hon. Patricia  
Kaliati, MP

The Minister of Justice and Member of Parliament for Thyolo East, Prof. Peter  
Mutharika,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

The Commander of the Malawi Army, General Marko Chiziko

The Inspector General of Police, Mr. Peter Mukhito

The District Commissioner Mr Bester Mandele,

Members of the Judiciary,

Heads of Statutory Corporations,

Members of the diplomatic corps and UN colleagues,

Traditional leaders present,

Chief Executives,

Mr. Dexter Mkandawire from Farmers World,

Representatives of various government ministries and civil society,

Members of the press,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Children.

Madam Chimobmo, we have waited for this day for a long time. What you are about to launch - the Family Support Package for Child-Headed Households - represents a quantum leap in the Government's efforts to provide basic social services to all children, especially poor children.

I am delighted that you could spare some time in your busy schedule to join us here today. I want to thank you wholeheartedly for this important gesture which signals to us that in you, we may have found an ally who will help us champion the cause of Malawian children here and abroad.

We in UNICEF look forward to partnering with your office, as we have done with First Ladies in other countries, to ensure that we raise the profile of children in Malawi.

The challenges facing children in this country are there for all to see. While indeed there are thousands, if not millions, of children who are able to afford a meal, go to school, wear decent clothes, and enjoy the benefits of a safe and supportive family environment, statistics and our own experience tell us that millions of children in Malawi still lead very difficult lives.

Everywhere I have been, from the foothills of Mzimba to the plains of Chikwawa, right across the full length and breadth of this beautiful country, I have met children who have gone for days without food. Graciously invited into their homes, I have been disturbed by their lack of the most basic necessities of life – things like beddings, soap, cooking utensils, and clothes. Many bear the tell-tale signs of under-nourishment, too thin or too short for their age and some live alone, having lost both parents to disease. These children are the human face of poverty, and they bear the greatest brunt.

Lest we forget, these children have an equal stake in their country. Their rights are no less important than those of their better-off counterparts. They have dreams too. Many have told me how, when they grow up, they want to be doctors and nurses, pilots and teachers. They work hard to make a living and

walk long distances to school, all in the hope of one day realizing their dream. Perhaps because they are children, they do this without petulance or riot, only asking of us as duty bearers the chance to break out of the cycle of poverty, much of it inter-generational, so that they can have a fair shot at realizing their dreams.

Madam Chimombo, today's launch is intended to draw national attention to the situation of child-headed households in Malawi. No child should have to perform the role of a parent to his or her siblings; indeed, no child should have to grow up alone, forced to be adults before their time. Yet this is the reality for children in child-headed households. Today, we call upon everyone – communities, traditional leaders, faith leaders, district authorities, and our national leaders – to do all they can to support these vulnerable children. We each have a responsibility to protect, provide and care for these children in whatever way we can.

The Family Support Package, consisting of items like plastic sheets, chlorine, mosquito nets, cooking utensils, beddings, et cetera, in no meets all the needs of child-headed households. However, it will do much to improve the

lives of these children, enabling them to have a dozen or so fewer things to worry about.

But we see it only as the first step. As enduring partners of the government and people of Malawi, we in the United Nations would like to see children occupy a more central place in the next Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) and all district development and implementation plans. As we know, the MGDS is all about fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals. If, as is the case, six of the eight Millennium Development Goals directly relate to children, then it follows that all efforts to achieve these goals must prioritise service delivery to children.

We will spare no effort to ensure that poor and vulnerable children benefit from social support interventions, such as the social cash transfer programme. I believe that these types of interventions, coupled with ongoing efforts to strengthen laws and systems around foster care and adoption, represent tangible efforts to better the lives of children, especially those without parents or guardians.

Madam Chimombo, let me end by assuring you and your government that we will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you to ensure that the rights of all children in Malawi are realized. Nothing is impossible. Together we will deliver on our promises for children. Together, we will fulfill the dreams and aspirations of every Malawian child.

Zikomo kwambiri.