

SPEECH

**BY UNICEF RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE MS. CARRIE AUER
AT THE COMMEMORATION OF THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD**

LILONGWE

16TH JUNE 2010

- Your Excellency the President, Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika;
- The First Lady, Madam Callista Mutharika;
- The Minister of Gender, Child Development and Community Services,
Honourable Patricia Kaliati (MP);
- All Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers;
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Dear children;
- Members of the civil society;
- Members of the press;
- Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today is a wonderful and memorable day in the lives of children in Malawi. This year, not only are we remembering children and acknowledging their valuable contributions to Malawian society, we are also blessed to have in

our midst His Excellency the President Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika and his lovely wife, Madam Mutharika.

Your Excellency, your presence sends a strong signal of your commitment to improving the lives of children in Malawi. We are encouraged by your expressed wish to see that no child goes to bed hungry, that every child is given the opportunity to live and thrive, and to grow up into useful citizens of this great country.

The theme for this year's Day of the African Child, "**Planning and Budgeting for Children: Our Collective Responsibility**" is most appropriate for Malawi because we are currently engaged in the process of developing the next Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). This process offers us the chance to prioritize children in the next MGDS and to ensure that enough resources are allocated to those areas where children are likely to benefit the most.

Your Excellency, we in the United Nations are especially pleased by the progress Malawi has made in reducing child mortality in the last two decades. Under-five mortality has fallen from 234 deaths for every 1000 live

births in 1992 to 100 deaths per 1000 live births in 2009. At this rate, Malawi is on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of reducing under-five deaths by two-thirds by 2015.

Malawi has made similar progress in increasing access to safe water and sanitation, which helps to reduce diarrhoea in young children. Almost three-quarters of the population have access to safe water and 88 per cent to improved sanitation. Back in 1992, less than half the population had access to safe water, and improved sanitation was available to only 72 per cent of the population.

We have also seen an extraordinary rise in school enrolments. We commend the Government's decision to abolish school fees and are encouraged by ongoing efforts to make primary schooling compulsory. These efforts have and will ensure that every Malawian child is afforded the opportunity to go to school and create a better future for themselves and their families.

Your Excellency, this progress would not have been possible without increased budgetary allocations to important sectors such as health, education,

water and sanitation, and agriculture and food security. In the last few years, we have seen a steady increase in the Government's allocations to the education and health sectors. In the 2010/2011 budget, the Government's allocations to health and education account for 15.5 and 20 percent of the national budget. Taken together, health and education, which have a direct benefit on children, account for almost half of the entire budget.

Your Excellency, Malawi has deservedly received international recognition for many things. Allow me to add my voice to those who have recognized your Government's achievements by highlighting two important milestones Malawi has achieved in this year's budget:

The first is the **Abuja Target of Allocating 15% of the Annual Budget to the Health Sector**. This target, as you might be aware, was set by Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity as the African Union was known then. Meeting in Abuja, Nigeria in April 2001, the Heads of State pledged to allocate 15% of their annual budgets to health as a way of accelerating the response to HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. We are pleased that in the budget recently presented to Parliament by the

Minister of Finance Honourable Ken Kandodo, Malawi has achieved the Abuja target. Your Excellency, you and your Government deserve to be congratulated.

The second is the **Dakar Target of Allocating 20% of the Annual Budget to the Education Sector**. This target was agreed upon at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000. Again, we are pleased to note that in the 2010/2011 fiscal year, Malawi has achieved the Dakar Education for All target. Congratulations Your Excellency.

As we move forward, Your Excellency, allow me would like to draw your attention to two areas that require your Government's attention. Firstly, **the need for a comprehensive Children's Policy and National Plan of Action**. In its Concluding Observations to Malawi's Second Periodic Report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Malawi to adopt a comprehensive Children's Policy and National Plan of Action for Children that will fully address all the rights of the child as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A comprehensive children's policy will provide an overall framework and direction for the work we do for children by bringing into one policy all the different intentions of the Government for children that, at the moment, are in several different policies.

A comprehensive plan of action will enable us to track budget allocations for children and include a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for regularly assessing progress. There also is a need to establish an inter-ministerial steering committee to oversee implementation.

Secondly, **the need to ensure that children are placed at the center of the next Malawi Growth and Development Strategy.** As we know, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 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 delivery of services to children.

We believe that when children are specifically prioritized in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, the country will be able to accelerate

progress towards the MDGs on maternal and newborn health, malnutrition and education retention and achievement where progress is currently lagging.

Your Excellency, let me end by reiterating our commitment to working with your Government to ensure that the rights of all children in Malawi are realized. Children, especially those who come from the ranks of the poor and downtrodden, are rarely heard and their rights are the most violated. These children are often rendered vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Together with our sister agencies in the United Nations, we will continue to support your efforts to ensure that no child is left behind. We share a common obligation and a future that is increasingly becoming one. No child in any country, village or community should have their rights violated simply because of their nationality. Together we can ensure that we deliver on our promises for children. Together, we can fulfil the dreams and aspirations of every Malawian child.

Zikomo!