

## **SPEECH**

**BY THE UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE, MS. CARRIE AUER AT THE  
OFFICIAL OPENING OF A TRAINING WORKSHOP ON CHILD RIGHTS  
FOR DISTRICT PLANNERS**

**LILONGWE,**

**9TH DECEMBER 2009**

Mrs. Olive Chikankheni, Principal Secretary for Gender, Children and  
Community Development,

Mr. Patrick Kabambe, Principal Secretary for Local Government and Rural  
Development,

District Commissioners,

District Planning Directors,

Representatives from various government ministries,

Civil society representatives,

UN colleagues, including our UN volunteers,

Members of the press,

Ladies and gentlemen

Let me begin my brief remarks by emphasizing that we in UNICEF view this training as an important milestone in Malawi's quest to fulfill the rights of every child. It comes at an opportune time, for it was only last month that the country joined the rest of the world in commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since world leaders made the historic decision on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1989 to codify child rights into a universal convention called the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), millions of children worldwide have been able to enjoy their rights to survive, develop, be protected from abuse and exploitation, and express their views freely on important issues affecting their lives.

The CRC has, in so many ways, changed the way that we view and treat children. We no longer see children as being less deserving of human rights, occupying the lowest rung in social ladders. Rather, through the principle of the "best interests of the child", we see children being given the primacy in key national plans and programs. And even at community level, we have seen a

change in attitudes and a greater willingness by communities to engage in solutions that will uplift the lives of children.

As the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said, “we must put the best interests of children at the heart of political and business decision-making, and at the center of our day-to-day behaviours and activities.”

In the coming three days, we will be challenged to renew our commitment to making a difference for children. We will gain a better understanding of child rights and see how we can better serve the interests of children through the various planning tools at our disposal.

I am sure we don't need to be reminded of the difficult situations in which many children are growing up in Malawi today. More than 40 percent of the population lives in poverty, and that includes 4 million children. Behind these figures are the real faces of children, whose lives are marked by a daily struggle for survival. Often they go to bed hungry, are unable to access even the most basic of treatments, go to over-crowded schools, and are exposed to all kinds of abuse and exploitation.

For these children, we have the greatest duty to ensure that we give them help, and the chance to break out of the cycle of poverty that life has bequeathed them. They, like children everywhere, deserve to have the best shot at life.

One way we can deliver for marginalized and poor children is to ensure that we come up with an integrated package of services that meets their needs in a holistic manner. We need to build on the lessons and experiences gained from years of implementing the Accelerated Child Survival and Development strategy. In the course of these three days, you will have a chance to reflect on what these experiences and lessons are and how they can help you to define and integrate a holistic package of services in your District Development Plans and District Implementation Plans.

The increased momentum towards decentralisation offers us a great opportunity to put children at the heart of our district plans and for these plans to be financed by the government, the UN and other development partners.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, let me end by reiterating UNICEF's commitment to working with your government to ensure that the

rights of all children in Malawi are realized. 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 where they live or where they were born. Together we can ensure that we deliver on our promises for children. Together, we can fulfill the dreams and aspirations of every Malawian child.

Zikomo kwambiri.