

SPEECH

**BY UNICEF RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE, MS. CARRIE AUER
AT THE SIGNING OF THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN UNICEF AND IRISH AID FOR SUPPORT TO THE
SOCIAL CASH TRANSFER SCHEME IN MALAWI.**

6th OCTOBER 2010

Lilongwe

The Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community
Development, Mr. Eric Ning'ang'a,

His Excellency, the Irish Ambassador to Malawi Mr. Liam Mac Gabhann

All government officials present

Senior staff from the Irish mission to Malawi

Members of the Press

Ladies and Gentleman

First of all, allow me to express on behalf of UNICEF my sincere thanks and appreciation to you, Ambassador Mac Gabhann and your Government, for the support you continue to render to the children of Malawi. We are delighted with this grant from the Irish Government because it will not only benefit the

24,000 families who are on the social cash transfer programme but it also stands to benefit 65,000 children who are currently included in the programme.

This grant, amounting to K170 million, demonstrates yet again the Irish Government's ongoing commitment to improving the lives of children in Malawi. It adds to previous grants of K80 million for a micronutrient survey, donated in November 2008, K24 million for implementation of the social support roadmap, donated in September 2009, and K220 million to support the implementation of the National Nutrition Policy.

These grants play a critical role in alleviating some of the most difficult and intractable problems confronting children in this country. The grant being provided today will help us bridge a funding gap in the social cash transfer programme and ensure that the 98,000 individuals on the scheme continue to receive their monthly cash grants. This means they can continue to put food on their tables, buy the necessities of life, send their children to school, and pay for medical treatment.

The grant fits well with the argument we are increasingly beginning to make at the global and national level: that progress towards the Millennium Development Goals can only be fast-tracked if we focused more on reaching the poorest and most excluded communities. Our argument emanates from the

observation that while nations are making steady progress towards the MDGs, gaps between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, the young and the old, men and women, are not narrowing fast enough. In some cases, the gaps are actually increasing.

It therefore makes sense to focus on narrowing these gaps as a strategy for accelerating progress. Allow me to advance three reasons why such an approach makes sense:

Firstly, evidence shows that it is possible for children to be left behind as countries make social-economic progress. It is not enough to focus on progress alone without analyzing how that progress is spread. For example, a key characteristic of poverty in Malawi is that it affects more disproportionately children living in female-headed households in both urban and rural areas.

According to the Malawi Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment of December 2007, poor households tend to be larger than non-poor households. They also have a higher dependency ratio and are more likely to be headed by persons with little or no education.

Secondly, reaching the poorest and most marginalized children is more cost-effective than focusing on the more accessible. Because the needs are

greatest among the most vulnerable children, the returns in children's lives saved and enriched can be greater still. In other words, reaching the most children does not necessarily guarantee saving the most children.

Thirdly, we cannot succeed in our efforts to tackle major child killers like measles, malaria and neonatal complications if we do not focus our services on reaching the poorest. For, it is in the poorest and most marginalized communities that these diseases find their best hiding places.

The social cash transfer programme, with its focus on reaching ultra-poor households, is a strong example of reaching the poorest and marginalized. In providing cash to ultra-poor and labor-constrained households, the programme has managed to transform lives, ensuring that children can have a diversified diet, attend school, and have access to treatment whenever they fall sick.

Finally, let me seize this opportunity to also thank the Government of Malawi, through you Principal Secretary, for your committed leadership in improving the lives of children in this country. I wish to assure you of UNICEF's continued cooperation and support as we together strive to better the lives of poor and vulnerable children, all of whom are looking to us for support.

I thank you