

SPEECH

BY UNICEF RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE MS. CARRIE AUER

**AT THE EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL MEETING ON JUSTICE FOR
CHILDREN.**

LILONGWE, MALAWI

24TH August, 2009

The Minister for Gender, Children and Community Development from the Republic of Malawi, Honourable Patricia Kaliati, (M.P),

The Solicitor General, Mr. Anthony Kamanga,

Your Lordship Justice Edward Twea of the High Court of Malawi,

Honourable Justices here present,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today marks the beginning of yet another important milestone in our continued efforts to provide a better life for millions of children across Africa. When our leaders met at the Millennium Summit in New York nine years ago to pledge their commitment to advance human rights for all, many of us had no illusions about the monumental scale and gravity of the task that lay ahead of us.

Since 2000, much progress has been made. Millions of young lives have been saved, more children than ever are enrolled in school, and millions more actively participate in decisions

that affect their lives. These achievements however have been uneven and obstacles still remain. Fulfilling a better life for all children everywhere remains an elusive goal and nations continue to struggle to keep their promises. Overall gains have fallen far short of national obligations and international commitments.

Today, as we stand on the cusp of yet another decade full of potential, we have an opportunity to revisit our promises and redouble our efforts to create a better world for children; a world in which sustainable human development is anchored on providing peace and social justice to the most vulnerable in our society, especially children.

Let me extend my sincere thanks to the Government of Malawi who have graciously hosted this meeting. We aim to leave having forged a common understanding of the meaning and importance of Justice for Children, crucial to fulfilling our obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Honourable Minister, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, we in UNICEF recognize that a functioning justice system is important in reducing poverty and promoting peace, security and human rights. This is why we view this meeting as an important step in promoting the rule of law and widening access to justice, especially for children.

We seek to ensure that the rights of children are protected and all children who come into contact with the justice system are treated in a sensitive manner in accordance with international norms and standards.

As Governments in the region progress towards domesticating the CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, increased attention is being given to strengthening child protection systems, including those related to justice for children. Ensuring child-friendly and gender-sensitive justice systems is an obligation under both the CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Yet, as we all know, rule-of-law initiatives hardly ever consider the best interest of the child as a key cornerstone.

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 rendered vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and neglect, failed by a system that was meant to protect them.

If there is any message that we must take with us from this meeting, it is this: ***children are looking up to us to make our justice system work better for them.*** In Eastern and Southern Africa, we carry an even greater responsibility: we have more than 40 million orphans, many of whom are without caregivers, living their lives exposed to all kinds of abuses and exploitation. It bears no mention that girls are especially vulnerable.

We in UNICEF and the wider United Nations family reaffirm our commitment to support you in this important mission. 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 trampled upon because they cannot access justice when they need it most. Together we can ensure that our justice systems work for children. Together, we can make an Africa Fit for Children.

I thank you!