

SPEECH

**BY UNICEF RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE MS. CARRIE AUER AT THE
LAUNCH OF 'NETWORK OF DISTRICT COMMUNICATORS' MEETING**

Livingstonia Beach Hotel, Salima

April 7, 2009

The Minister of Information and Civic Education, Hon. Mrs. Patricia Kaliati, MP;

The Secretary for Information and Civic Education, Mr. Jeffrey Kanyinji;

The Director of Information, Mr. Nelson Magombo;

Officials from the Health Education Unit;

Officials from the Ministry of Information and Civic Education;

My colleagues from UNICEF;

All District IEC Officers and Information Officers;

Distinguished colleagues from the media;

Invited guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today marks an important milestone in our quest to see greater improvements in the lives of children in Malawi. The Network of District Communicators that we are launching today will see the advent of greater co-operation and cohesion in information sharing and dissemination at district and national levels.

The network comprises Information, Education and Communication Officers from District Health Offices and Information Officers from the Ministry of Information and Civic Education.

Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to make a special recognition of these two cadres of information officers who are at the frontline of our battle to create a Malawi fit for children. At district level, they are critical in ensuring that information about what people are facing, their daily challenges and struggles and the hopes and dreams they harbour for their children is disseminated to those in positions of power and leadership.

The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals related to child survival, health and development and maternal health is dependent in part on the work of these district information colleagues. They are charged with the responsibility of planning and executing communication activities that will change individual behaviour at household, district and community levels. It is with this realization in mind that UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Information and Civic Education to improve district level capacity for implementation of communication strategies in priority areas. I am hopeful that our support will result in a change in behaviours that hinder development at the grassroots level.

Already communication tools have been developed in consultation with our district colleagues addressing issues relating to Accelerated Child Survival and Development, Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV, Social

Sanitation and Hygiene, Avian Influenza, Girls' Education and Emergency Communication, including Cholera.

Honourable Minister, the effectiveness of these tools will depend largely on the successful implementation of community and district strategies, with the keen understanding, vim and vigour of the district information officers. By their closeness to communities, they are best placed to lead in implementing these activities.

This Network we are launching today therefore serves to close the gap that has existed between colleagues at the national and district levels. The network will herald the beginning of a new era where development communication will be reflected through the establishment and strengthening of grassroots structures. This indeed is the spirit and vision of the Government's policy of decentralization.

In closing, I wish to thank you all for gathering here today so that we can share strategies, challenges and, most importantly, opportunities for reaching out with critical, life-saving information to those who need it most, especially the children and women of Malawi.

I thank you for your attention.

ZIKOMO!