

SPEECH

**By the UNICEF Deputy Representative Dr. Jane Muita on behalf
of GAVI at the Official Launch of Pneumococcal Conjugate
Vaccine and LLIN Distribution Campaign**

12th November, 2011

The Honourable Minister of Health, Dr. Jean Kalilani, MP

The Deputy Minister of Health, Honourable Ralph Jooma, MP

The Secretary for Health, Mr Willie Samute,

The Principle Secretary, Dr. Charles Mwansambo,

All Senior Officers of the Ministry of Health,

District Health Officers,

Your Excellency the US Ambassador to Malawi, Ms. Jeanine Jackson,

Representatives from GAVI cooperating partners and donor agencies,

Members of the press,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I stand before you this morning on behalf of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI), who, as we already know, do not have a presence in Malawi but rely on the commitment and support of partners like

UNICEF to convey its core mission of saving lives by improving access to immunization in developing countries. Let me also extend the sincere apologies of UNICEF Representative Ms. Carrie Auer for not being present here today because of other pressing commitments. She nevertheless wishes all of us a very successful launch.

Honourable Minister, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, today is a memorable day in Malawi's continuing efforts to reduce child morbidity and mortality. The launch we are witnessing marks a huge step in our collective efforts to prevent diseases caused by the pneumococcal bacterium. At the same time, we are delighted that in launching the new vaccine together with the SADC Malaria Week and the mass distribution of over five million mosquito nets, we are signaling our intention to vigorously address two of the largest causes of child morbidity and mortality in Malawi: acute respiratory diseases, largely attributed to pneumonia, and malaria. These two diseases are a terrible scourge to children in Malawi and we need to tackle them with all the resolve and resources we can marshal.

As many of you might be aware, GAVI is an international coalition of partners that includes national governments, some of whom are represented here this morning. In bringing together a wide array of organizations such as UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the private sector, and research and public health

institutions, GAVI has demonstrated that when all stakeholders unite around a common vision, nothing is impossible.

Since its inception eleven years ago, GAVI has mobilized and disbursed close to 2.9 billion United States Dollars. In the process, more than five million deaths globally have been averted through routine immunization against hepatitis B, *Haemophilus Influenza* Type B, and whooping cough. 70 countries have benefited from this effort, including Malawi.

We need to remember that at the time GAVI was established in 2000, immunization rates in many developing countries were falling. On average, new vaccines were being introduced in developing countries fifteen years after their debut in developed countries. GAVI was therefore launched to try and narrow this gap by accelerating access to new and under-used vaccines in the world's poorest countries. I am pleased to report that GAVI has made good progress in this area.

Honourable Minister, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, the partnership between GAVI and the Government of Malawi dates way back to 2000. During this period, GAVI's support to Malawi has included strengthening health and immunization systems, injection safety, and the introduction of the DPT-HebB+Hib vaccine, popularly known in this country as Pentavalent vaccine. By March 2011, GAVI had disbursed a total of 74.5 million United States Dollars to Malawi.

We are pleased to note that the introduction of Pentavalent vaccine in Malawi has already yielded positive results. For example, the number of children hospitalized for meningitis due to *Haemophilus influenza* at Queen Elizabeth Hospital has significantly declined from an average of 70 patients per year prior to 2002 to 10 patients per year in 2010. GAVI is very pleased that today, Malawi is adding yet another vaccine to its already powerful armory of tools to combat childhood diseases.

Honourable Minister, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, pneumonia kills more under-five children globally than any other childhood disease. The World Health Organization estimates that of the 9 million children who died in 2007, 1.8 million (or 20 per cent) were due to pneumonia. If we can achieve a high coverage of PCV13, which we are launching today in Malawi, we can expect to significantly reduce morbidity and prevent child deaths caused by pneumococcal infection.

As GAVI partners, we are convinced that no economic and social development can take place where immunization is lagging behind. Immunization enables every child to reach his or her full physical and intellectual potential.

GAVI's efforts to increase access to immunization are consistent with the Global Action Plan for the Prevention of and Control of Pneumonia, which is promoted by both WHO and UNICEF. The Action Plan calls for:

- Effective case management at community and health facility level;
- Increased and sustained high vaccine coverage for pneumonia prevention vaccines (e.g. measles, DPT, and PCV);
- Improvements of nutrition and reduction of low birth weight including promotion of exclusive breastfeeding;
- Prevention and control of HIV infection including prevention of Mother – to – Child Transmission of HIV, and
- Control of in-door air pollution.

If implemented effectively, these interventions can reduce morbidity and mortality due to pneumonia by more than half. We therefore have no doubt that the introduction of PCV13 in routine immunization will help Malawi meet the Millennium Development Goal of reducing child deaths by two thirds by 2015.

Honourable Minister, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, let me take this opportunity to inform you that the Board of GAVI has approved Malawi's application for the introduction of the Rotavirus vaccine in 2013. We believe that, Honourable Minister, your Ministry has already been informed of this decision and we can only look forward to a similar function in the near future where we will be able to launch the Rotavirus vaccine in Malawi.

On behalf of GAVI, and indeed on behalf of the children benefitting from these initiatives, allow me to thank most sincerely all the governments, organizations and partners who have made it possible for GAVI to work so

effectively with developing countries in protecting children from immunisable diseases. You should be proud that your noble efforts to improve the lives of children in developing countries like Malawi are bearing results.

Allow me, Honourable Minister, to also thank you and the Government of Malawi for your unflinching commitment to improving access to immunization for all. Malawi's Expanded Program on Immunization is one of the best in Africa as evidenced by the high immunization coverage for all childhood antigens. We owe this success to the commitment and dedication of your government and all health providers, including Health Surveillance Assistants, to ensuring that no child is left behind.

On behalf of GAVI, and indeed on my own behalf, I would now like to wish Malawi a successful introduction of PCV13. Let me also wish the Ministry of Health a very productive distribution of long-lasting insecticide treated nets.

Thank you for your attention