

SPEECH

BY UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE, MS. CARRIE AUER AT THE COMMEMORATION OF DAY OF AFRICAN CHILD

18 June, 2011

Lunzu Primary School, Blantyre

The Minister for Gender, Children and Community Development, Hon.
Theresa Mwale, MP

All cabinet ministers present

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

Members of parliament

All government officials present

Development partners in attendance

Members of the Press

Our dear children

Ladies and Gentleman

Today is a wonderful and memorable day in the lives of children in Malawi. We are remembering children and acknowledging their valuable contributions to Malawian society and the hope for the future they represent. Madame Minister, your presence sends a strong signal of your commitment to improving the lives of children in Malawi.

The theme for this year's Day of the African Child, "**All Together for Urgent Actions in Favor of Street Children**" is most appropriate for Malawi as it reminds us of the need to protect all children from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. Today children in Malawi are facing many challenges to realize their rights as accorded both in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Malawi Constitution.

Honorable Minister, we in the United Nations are especially pleased by the progress Malawi has made in reducing child mortality reducing it from 234 deaths for every 1000 live births in 1992 to 112 deaths per 1000 live births in 2010. At this rate, Malawi is on track to achieve the

Millennium Development Goal of reducing under-five deaths by two-thirds by 2015.

Malawi has made similar progress in increasing access to safe water and sanitation. Almost three-quarters of the population have access to safe water and 88 per cent to improved sanitation. Back in 1992, less than half the population had access to safe water, and improved sanitation was available to only 72 per cent of the population.

We also have seen an extraordinary rise in school enrolments. We commend the Government's decision to abolish school fees and are encouraged by ongoing efforts to make primary schooling compulsory. These efforts have and will ensure that every Malawian child is afforded the opportunity to go to school and create a better future for themselves and their families.

While there has been progress in realizing children's rights, the reality many children live in is still far from ideal. Currently, there are four million children living in poverty of which 1.1 million live in extreme poverty. Specifically to child protection, Honorable Minister, Malawi lacks

comprehensive statistics but the little available data indicates that around 65 per cent of girls and 35 per cent of boys experience some form of child abuse during their lifetime. A third of girls aged 15 – 19 years are married and 26 per cent of children are involved in child labour. Nearly 13 per cent of Malawi's children have lost one or both parents, half of them to HIV-related illnesses. Less than 10 per cent of children under-five years of age have a birth certificate. While 17 per cent of children have special needs, only three-quarters of them are in special needs centers.

After listening to this long list of challenges we might all be thinking that things look pretty bleak. This is not necessarily the case. We commend the Government of Malawi for taking several positive steps to improve the situation of its most vulnerable children through enactment of the following key legislation:

- the National Registration and Identification Act (2009),
- the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act (2010),
- the Deceased Estate, Wills and Inheritance (Act 2011), and
- enforcement of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2006).

In addition, the draft of the new Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 2012 to 2016 identifies the establishment and enforcement of the

national child protection system as a major pillar for the social development of the country.

These key pieces of legislation provide a strong foundation for protecting children in Malawi against all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. The challenge before us now is to ensure that they are fully resourced and implemented.

In partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development, the Judiciary and NGO partners, UNICEF is committed to supporting the implementation of the provisions of these legislative frameworks to ensure that all children in Malawi are protected.

Work is already underway in several areas and includes a mapping exercise for the establishment of a child protection system in the country; and costing of the implementation of the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act. UNICEF also will continue working with the National Registration Bureau to put in place systems for registration of all children which is a prerequisite for protecting them.

We also will continue supporting the Government in implementing the social cash transfer programme which is a social protection mechanism that plays a key role in supporting vulnerable families and prevents children from leaving their homes to try and scrape out a living on the street or in

other exploitative labour conditions. Evidence has shown that children, who have support, tend to stay longer in school.

Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, UNICEF calls upon Government to strengthen these support systems which provide a basis for a more protective environment in families and communities to keep children safe and strengthen families through the provision of basic social, health and education services.

Moving forward, Honourable Minister, allow me to draw your attention to an area that requires your attention and leadership. There is need for a comprehensive Children's Policy and National Plan of Action. A comprehensive children's policy will provide an overall framework and direction for the work we all do for children by bringing into policy all the different intentions of the Government for children that, at the moment, are in several different policies.

A comprehensive plan of action will enable all of us to track budget allocations for children and include a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for regularly assessing progress. There also is a need to establish an inter-ministerial steering committee to oversee implementation.

For this to happen Honorable Minister there is need for more resources to be allocated to the government departments and civil society organisations working in the area of child protection. We hope the current sitting of parliament will prioritize resources to Ministries that have a duty of care towards children.

Honourable minister, let me reiterate our commitment to working with your Government to ensure that the rights of all children in Malawi are realized. Children, especially the most vulnerable, are rarely heard and their rights are the most violated.

Together with our sister agencies in the UN and other partners, we will continue to support your efforts to ensure that no child is left behind. We share a common obligation to make a difference. Together, we can ensure that we deliver on our promises for children. Together we can create a Malawi fit for children.

Zikomo.