

**STATEMENT BY THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
MALAWI,**

RIGHT HONOURABLE JOYCE BANDA

**AT THE HIGH LEVEL MEETING ORGANISED BY THE
AFRICAN CHILD POLICY**

**CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AT A CROSS-ROADS: A GLOBAL
CONFERENCE ON RESEARCH AND CHILD RIGHTS**

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA,

30TH NOVEMBER 2009

- Her Excellency Mufrihat Kamil, Minister of Women's Affairs
Representing the Government of Ethiopia at this
Conference
- The Chairperson of the International Board of Trustees for
The African Child Policy Forum, His Excellency, Dr. Salim;
- Honorable Minister from Norway
- Honorable Minister from Cyprus
- The Executive Director of The African Child Policy Forum,
Dr. Assefa Bequele;
- The President of Childwatch International; Dr Irene Rizzin
- The Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Saad Houry
- The Deputy Directory, UNICEF Innocent Centre, Dr David
Parker
- The UN Special Representative on Violence Against
Children; Dr Marta Santos Pais
- The Former Chair of the UNCRC; Prof Jaap Doek

- **Representatives from the African Union**
- **Your Excellency Malawi's Ambassador to the African Union; Mr. Kalilangwe**
- **Representatives from International Organisations;**
- **Distinguished Participants**
- **Members of the Press;**
- **Ladies and gentlemen.**

I am very happy to be given the honor and privilege to be guest of honor at this Global Conference on Research and Child rights. I perform this function on behalf of the President of Malawi Dr Bingu wa Mutharika who could not make it to this Conference due to other state duties, but found it appropriate that he delegates his Vice President to represent him.

I am glad to be here to perform this duty, but also because I am Malawi's Most Eminent Person on Early

Childhood Development, therefore I am delighted that I could personally be involved in a forum that is discussing children's issues. Honorable Minister, children issues are dear to my heart and any opportunity that comes my way to be involved with children is blessing for me.

I wish to thank the Government of Ethiopia for the hospitality accorded to me and my delegation since our arrival.

Honourable Minister, the timing of this conference is ideal because this year we are marking twenty years of the birth of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. There could not be a better way of celebrating this anniversary other than to renew our efforts towards our children. The twenty years have seen marked progress on issues of child rights and wellbeing. Statistics show that global trends are positive. However, despite the progress that has been made, a lot still remains to be done. The numbers of

children living in poverty still remains a major problem that we must deal with.

Honorable Minister, the three days ahead of us present an opportunity to review our obligations towards the survival, growth and holistic development of children. What is even more captivating is that the various research studies and the presentations of various aspects of The African Report on Children's Rights will bring to surface global issues affecting our children, and some country specific issues related and contextual to children in Africa. The thematic roundtables and research policy roundtables that have been organized will present an opportunity for all participants in reflection and dialogue for a better and more relevant knowledge base for future child rights strategies.

Honorable Minister, I also want to emphasize the point that it is important that research, knowledge and information on children is relevant and deals with the prevailing issues. For example, globally we are facing a

financial crisis, and Honorable Minister I beg to ask if we have asked ourselves how this financial crisis is affecting or going to affect children.

Am sure you are all aware that whenever, there is financial crisis and there are budget cuts to be made, the practice by many governments and other sectors is to cut the budgets for the social sector and this is the sector which is responsible for children. This consequently has got a bearing on the wellbeing of children. I hope the stakeholders gathered at this conference can begin to analyse the impact the global economic crisis will have or is having on children, and begin to present data that can inform policies and budgets in the interest of children.

Another issue of global concern is the climate change. Lets us start to engage more on climate change from our children's perspective. We know that when we talk of the adverse impacts of climate change we are worried about the future, and we know that our children are this future we are worried about. Therefore

I would like to challenge us all to begin to raise the dialogue on climate change with the perspective of our children.

I know that across the world, our children face a lot of problems, poverty is still rampant, the trafficking of children is on the rise, conflicts that are prevailing in some countries place our children in difficult circumstances as child soldiers, as victims of displacement, rape and torture. In developing countries, particularly Sub Saharan Africa, there is a problem of orphans as a result of HIV and AIDS. The efforts in addressing these two problems have got a high bearing on the budgets of a number of countries. We have to therefore look at some of the preventive measures – measures to reduce the growing number orphans by increasing access to anti-retroviral drugs so that parents can live longer and less children become orphaned early.

I also note with regret that most of our policies and programs do not adequately address strategic needs

of children with special needs like street children, children with disabilities, children in prisons, female children in forced marriages and children heading their own households as a result of HIV and AIDS. I therefore hope that from this conference, additional research agendas can be developed to address some of these key challenges our children face.

Honorable Minister, the 2008 research done by the African Child Policy Forum assessing how child friendly African governments are, observed that it not necessarily resources that will ensure the wellbeing of children. Those of you who have read the report have seen that some countries rich in resources do not have good rating on child friendliness. The report emphasizes that other factors like political will is fundamental in ensuring the wellbeing of children.

At this point allow me to talk of my own country Malawi, which was rated among the best ten countries in the category of the most child friendly governments in Africa. Am sure you are aware that Malawi is not a

country of plenty, and yet within our limited resources, we have been able to provide the best we can for the well being of our children.

In this vein I wish to highlight some of the key efforts that Malawi has undertaken over the years to be ranked as one of the most child friendly governments in Africa.

The issues of children are on the government agenda, and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy focuses on children as a category through social protection, and social development focusing on health, education and other key essential services.

With regard to protection of children, our government initiated several legislative reviews to make our laws more adequate and in line with the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children. We have reviewed all child specific laws and developed a comprehensive Child Care, Protection and Justice Bill, which is in harmony with the CRC and

The African Charter on The Rights and Welfare of Children. The Malawi Parliament which is currently in session has just passed the National Registration Bill which among other things aims at ensuring that all children are well registered and accounted for and well targeted in development policies and programs. Among the laws under review include the Trafficking in Persons Act, the Education Act, the Inheritance Act as well as the adoption Act.

Turning to budgetary commitment, I am pleased to report that in Malawi key sectors such as education, agriculture, health, water and sanitation and HIV and AIDS and nutrition have always been allocated larger shares of the national budget than most. In the 2008/2009 financial year, these key sectors received highest proportion of the national budget. The budget allocations to these key sectors enable children to access free primary education, essential health services including immunization, safe drinking water and nutritious food supplements.

In terms of provision of child related services, the government of Malawi has over the years indeed demonstrated a lot of commitment. In health, we have been implementing an Accelerated Child Survival and Development Programme through the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses, (IMCI). This was an attempt towards addressing deaths among children arising from preventable diseases. As a consequence, under-five mortality and infant mortality rates are gradually reducing, and we expect the trend we have registered to continue. In fact the country is expected to reach its target on the MDG related to reduction of child mortality. As for immunization, I am glad to report that we have achieved universal coverage through the Expanded Programme of immunization.

Honorable Minister, ladies and gentlemen, Malawi is implementing an agricultural subsidy programme as one way of eradicating hunger. Over the years, the programme has yield results by making sure that Malawi is food secure. In order to make sure that our being food secure is much more meaningful, the

government has been implementing several nutrition initiatives which include putting in place a nutrition policy and a comprehensive programme for implementing essential nutrition actions. We are also as a matter of policy promoting exclusive breast-feeding for children.

The Malawi government is also implementing a National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children which incidentally was launched when I was serving as the country's Minister of Gender and Child Welfare. This Plan of Action focuses on strengthening legal and policy frameworks for the care and protection of Orphans and Vulnerable Children; enhancing access to quality essential services and strengthening family and community coping mechanisms for care and protection of Orphans and Vulnerable Children.

The social protection for vulnerable groups including children is one of Malawi government's key priority themes. With a view to supporting vulnerable groups

(including children) that might not benefit from any socio-economic growth, a direct cash transfer scheme, public works programme and the agriculture subsidy programme are some of the key productivity enhancing interventions that are targeted at transforming individual households. The current government has committed itself to developing a Social Protection Policy that will guide implementation of all specific social protection programme.

In order to provide best start in life for our children and achieve maximum benefits from the investments that we make in education, government is implementing a policy on Early Childhood Development (ECD). Our Medium term goal is to increase access to ECD services the from current 30 percent to at least 80 percent. This will complement efforts being undertaken in achieving quality free primary education as well as the Education for All goals.

In Education, girls constituting 84% are attending school and 80% boys are attending school. This is a slight

improvement compared to what was reported in 2000. Net enrolment for boys is 93 % and 98 % for girls. The Millennium Development Goals promote increased primary education enrolment by 90% and this implies that Malawi is on track.

The Government of Malawi continues to implement a Child Protection Programme that contributes towards the creation of a protective environment for all children, with emphasis on the most vulnerable, through protection, prevention and rehabilitation. Government with support from partners continues to raise awareness on child abuse through the Zero Tolerance Campaign Against Child Abuse. We are also increasing access to justice for both women and children by increasing coverage of victim support services through establishing Community Based Victim Support Units on top of the police station based Victim Support units across the country. Other key results in child protection include the establishment of Four Child Friendly Courts in all regions, increasing the number of

Child Protection Workers so that we actively address issues of child protection within communities.

Honorable Minister, ladies and gentlemen, we realize that child participation is key to building a protective environment for our children and for molding leadership potentials inherent in our children. Therefore, in living up to the African Union Pan-African Resolution of 2001, the Malawi government has been promoting participation among children in issues that impact on their own development. In this regard we annually hold a Children's Parliament, which allows children from all backgrounds to come together and make resolutions on key issues that require action from government and other key duty bearers. Meanwhile, policy guidelines have been developed meant to foster child participation by taking the concept and practice of Children's Parliament to district and community levels.

Honorable Minister, these are some of the good practices that Malawi has been able to do even within

a resource constrained economy. It therefore gives me hope that each of our countries represented here can do something with the resources that we have at hand to make a difference to our children.

As Eminent Person on Early Childhood Development, I always remember the wise words spoken by our beacon of hope and source of inspiration Dr Nelson Mandela. He said an I quote " there can be no keener revelation of any society than in the way it treats its children" (end of Quote). I therefore hope at this conference, we can renew our efforts to ensure that our societies have a better reflection of themselves and this is seen in the eyes and well being of our children.

Let me concur with the report that a conducive political environment, optimal utilization and prioritization of the available resources towards children services and existence of a sound legal and policy framework for child protection can positively affect the well- being of our children.

My appeal especially to the African countries covered in the African Child Policy Forum report is that the position that the report shows should serve as a springboard for increasing our commitment and support towards child well-being. We should take the opportunity of the AU summit in January 2010 to advocate for child well-being amongst Heads of State. And to all the countries in other continents please let's forge ahead in making children's lives better.

Honorable Minister, ladies and gentlemen, let me finally commend the African Child Policy Forum, the Childwatch International Research Network, and UNICEF Innocent Research Centre and all their funders for organizing this special event. This forum will inform our programming, improve our interventions and service delivery for our children. It is our moral obligation to have our children realize their rights and live a life of dignity, hope and love. Honorable Minister, I always remember what one child told me. He said, and I quote "nothing for us without us," end of quote. I think in all our programs we need to include our

children. They are our hope, and let us not let them down. Our legacy as leaders should be that we made the world a better place for children.

May God Bless You

I thank you for your attention.