

SPEECH DELIVERED BY MCTU SECRETARY GENERAL MR. ROBERT
MKWEZALAMBA AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE MALAWI DECENT WORK
COUNTRY PROGRAMME HELD ON 9TH AUGUST, 2011, CROSS ROADS HOTEL,
LILONGWE

Allow me to first and foremost extend my presidents apologies for not being able to travel. In fact I too, almost sent apologies due to the recent developments in our country. I needed assurances from ministry of Labour that "I will not be smoked out!" hence when I got them, I managed to leave my hideout and hence I am here where my bread and butter is decided.

On behalf of the workers in Malawi, let me starting by saying that I am filled with gladness and joy to be party to the official launch of the ILO Decent Work Country Programme, which is a product of the joint effort of the social partners namely: Labour Ministry, Employers and trade unions and cooperating partners.

In his State of the Nation Address on the occasion of the Opening of the Budget Session of Parliament on the 3rd of May 2011, the State President of the Republic of Malawi, Ngwazi Prof. Bingu Wa Mutharika pointed out that Malawi's economy is reported to have achieved an economic miracle by growing at an average rate of 6.7 percent since 2005, well above the average rate of 5.5 percent for the Sub Saharan region. In addition, the official statistics that appear in the Annual Economic Report of 2010 issued by Ministry of Development Planning and Cooperation indicate that inflation in Malawi has continued to remain at single digit declining from 8.4 percent in 2009 to 7.4 percent in 2010. Indeed, as workers we salute the State President of the republic of Malawi Ngwazi Prof. Bingu wa Muthalika and the great people of Malawi for this achievement.

However, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development report of 2010 indicates that 80 percent of the people who are employed in Malawi earn less than USD 1.25 a day, which is below the poverty line. This then implies that a majority of the people in Malawi who are boasted by the government to be employed do not have decent and gainful jobs. As far as we are concerned the economic achievements Malawi has attained therefore represent a "Jobless growth"¹ which is not desirable in our view. This therefore suggests to us that employment and creation of decent jobs in particular, is not regarded as one key indicator of Malawi's macro-economic performance as far as the government is concerned. I must emphasize that this has always been a great concern to us workers in Malawi who immensely contribute to the wealth of the country through the provision of labour. To put it differently, let me say that women and men without decent jobs do not care if their economies grow annually at the rate of 6 percent and above of such a growth leaves them behind with a meager wage that does not enable them earn a decent living by Malawian standards. As such it should not be a surprise or regarded as "political" to employers and government when MCTU makes noise out there to advocate for a living wage.

¹ This is economic growth that has not created 'decent' employment.

Simply put, MCTU will continue raising issues of decent jobs and rights of workers in line with the four pillars of decent work country programme which includes Rights at work, freedoms, social protection and social dialogue. It is further in this regard that we call on employers and government to meaningfully come to the round table with us. Currently the minimum wage is MK178.25 (MK3921.00 a month) which makes it difficult for an ordinary Malawian to survive with his/her family. If we ask you to increase it, we are not doing politics and we would like you to understand us.

It is a fact that there are Unscrupulous employers who still do not want unions in their workplaces- but this only retards meaningful growth. We know they do so with a view to hide from the authorities and public their hidden agenda i.e. evading taxes and violating labour laws- hence a unionist is considered a threat or regarded as a Confusionists since he/she exposes such employers. I can further challenge that where you have Unions strikes have been minimized or do not occur at all.

Our humble appeal is to all Malawians to join Unions and have a safer work place and decent jobs. Equally we call on employers and even new investors to join ECAM- The more employers join ECAM the easier it becomes for government and MCTU as we will be agreeing to issues easily and implementation will not be a challenge.

Without mincing words, amidst the economic strides as mentioned above, there is a huge Decent Work Deficit in Malawi which the ILO Decent Work Country Programme we are launching today seeks to address. That is why as workers, we have always bitterly complained to the Ministry of Labour and even to the State President over the continued delay to launch this programme while other countries in the SADC region like Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia are moving towards launching the second phase of their respective ILO Decent Work Country programmes.

It is therefore our sincere hope that given the plight of the workers in Malawi in light of Decent Work deficit, and as a matter of national interest at large, the unnecessary delay we went through prior to this launch, will no longer be there when graduating from this first phase to the second.

We further appeal to Ministry of Labour to intensify labour inspections, there can never be meaningful decent employment if checks and balances in the workplaces are not being conducted by the Ministry. We appreciate your efforts but feel we can manage to do more. Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) fully supports the programmes' interventions and will do all it can on its part to ensure that the goals of this programme are realized for a better Malawi for all. Hence we appeal to our social partners i.e. Government and employers that the launch of this programme will be meaningless if we all fail to translate it into action on the ground.

Lastly, MCTU commends the technical team drawn from the social partners which has been meeting numerous occasions to draft the ILO Decent Work Country Programme for Malawi. The ILO should also be commended for the guidance and technical and financial support that has made it possible for us to launch this programme today.

Finally, as we officially launch this programme, we should all remember that in so many ways it is the quality of work that defines the quality of society!

THANK YOU!