



## Special sitting

Wednesday, 12 June 2013, 11 a.m.

*President: Mr Katamine*

### ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY DR JOYCE BANDA, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI

The PRESIDENT

Today the International Labour Conference is truly honoured to receive the visit of the President of the Republic of Malawi, Her Excellency Dr Joyce Banda. It is my pleasure to give the floor to the Secretary-General of the International Labour Conference, Mr Guy Ryder, to welcome our distinguished guest.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE

Your Excellency, Dr Joyce Banda, President of the Republic of Malawi, a very warm welcome to the International Labour Conference and thank you for being with us today.

Madam President, permit me to frame your visit in the context of a proverb from your own country: “*Mutu umodzi susenza denga.*” For the rest of the Conference, that means “One head cannot support a roof.” In the spirit of that proverb, we welcome you sincerely to our tripartite House – the three pillars of which are central to holding up the roof of social justice and sustainable development. And I think that I need to say welcome back to the ILO – as an alumna of the Training Centre of the ILO in Turin.

It comes as no surprise to anybody who has followed your life’s journey, Madam President, that today you are at the helm of your country, leading the women and men of Malawi on a path that is already transforming its social, political and economic landscape.

Some have described you as one of the most powerful women in Africa, but your concern, Madam President, has always been the imperative of empowering others – whether it be women, young people, or people living in poverty – and this is driven by your vision that all can and all must prosper together and the need to tackle the workings of the system that produces vulnerability.

At the recent ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the African Union in Addis Ababa and at the Summit of Heads of State and Government, which I had the privilege to attend, you and other African leaders conveyed the strong message that your growth, the “African Renaissance”, must be African-led, broad-based and inclusive, and that employment is the vehicle through which growth must translate into poverty alleviation.

Your 2013–18 Economic Recovery Plan sets out your strategy for the realization of that vision and it

is a vision that is well illustrated in your approach to the particular issue of child labour.

So, let me say how fitting it is that you are with us today as we observe the World Day Against Child Labour. Your personal commitment to this fight is well known and you are backing it with strong political commitment and action. Particularly important is your recognition of the need to mainstream child labour issues in all development programmes through an integrated approach that ranges from education to social protection to jobs for the parents. We could not agree more when you say that, “to be sustainable, agricultural and rural development cannot be based on the exploitation of children, but it should aim to create decent work opportunities”.

Madam President, your resolve to pursue an inclusive growth path is reflected in initiatives to develop and implement a social protection floor in line with the ILO’s Recommendation on this subject.

It is also expressed in your Government’s undertaking to reinforce support to the education sector and to improve skills to provide a productive underpinning to social and economic progress. In this regard, I might point to your action plan on skills for employability and productivity under the G20 initiative, for which Malawi is a pilot country.

Another important line of action is in the field of HIV and AIDS, including in the world of work. When the African Union Summit designated you as a champion on HIV, malaria and tuberculosis in the Southern African Development Community region, it undoubtedly recognized your role in Malawi’s achievements, for which we congratulate you.

Your contribution, Madam President, has, without doubt, played an important part in placing Malawi among the 15 African countries which have made the greatest progress on the Millennium Development Goals globally.

Your Excellency, you took office and took on the responsibility not only of a heavy development mission but also the task of building trust and restoring confidence. The ILO is honoured to be a partner of Malawi and to work with your Government and our tripartite constituents as you strive for equitable development – growing wealth, as well as opportunities for hope and freedoms, for all the Malawian people. Madam President, thank you for coming, we look forward to your message to our Conference.

*Ms BANDA (President of the Republic of Malawi)*

It is an honour and great privilege for me to address the 102nd Session of the International Labour

Conference today. I feel humbled and excited because, if my memory serves me right, this is the first time that a Head of State from the Republic of Malawi has been invited to address delegates at this most important function on the calendar of the ILO. I, therefore, do not take this invitation for granted. This is an honour, not only to me, but also to all the 15 million people of Malawi.

It is an honour for me also to be here today, on the World Day Against Child Labour. This issue is at the top of my agenda and I am pleased to be among friends who are fighters too against the exploitation of our children.

Let me take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Mr Guy Ryder, Director-General of the ILO, and the entire management of the International Labour Office for choosing to invite me out of so many Heads of State – some better known than myself and having been around much longer.

Incidentally, I have just clocked one year in office. I therefore take this occasion of the ILO's Conference and my association with the labour movement as an important feature of my first anniversary in the presidency. I note that this is Mr Ryder's maiden Conference to organize, and that he too will be completing a year as the Director-General of this great body. Congratulations to you, Mr Ryder, for assuming the high office of Director-General and for a very eventful and successful first anniversary.

I would also like to congratulate Professor Nidal Katamine, Minister of Labour and Transport of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, on his election to chair this very important Conference. I also congratulate the Officers for their well-deserved election. I wish them success as they steer the deliberations of this great Conference.

My address to this Conference will touch on a number of topical issues on decent work, particularly as they affect my country. I must say here that, through the Decent Work Agenda, the ILO's presence in Malawi and in many other member States is being felt more than ever before. I am pleased to note that the Decent Work Agenda is a complete package. It touches on all aspects of development and provides guiding principles for tackling development challenges.

The issue of decent work is an important aspect for development, especially for a country like mine. Between 2004 and 2009, Malawi registered some robust economic growth, averaging over 6 per cent per annum. But this growth was not accompanied by any tangible jobs created in the economy. The benefits did not trickle down to the population. It is, therefore, no wonder that, for the past ten years, poverty has not significantly decreased. The results of the integrated household survey in 2010–11 showed that the poverty headcount is still as high as 50.7 per cent. This is a big lesson for Malawians.

Noting these high levels of poverty in my country, I set out a vision for Malawi, which is to eradicate poverty through economic growth and wealth creation. I want to ensure that Malawi achieves growth that brings meaningful change in the lives of the people.

I am, therefore, grateful that, with the assistance of the ILO, my Government has developed the Malawi Decent Work Country Programme to address the challenge of jobless growth, among other challenges. The Decent Work Agenda is an integral part of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II

2011–16 and the Economic Recovery Plan which I launched when I came into office.

As some of you may be aware, at the time I became President of my country, the economy had almost collapsed. Foreign exchange was scarce and this created a very harsh business climate. Many companies scaled down production because they could not import raw materials in sufficient quantities, and some even closed down, resulting in massive job losses.

Therefore, the Malawi Decent Work Country Programme has greatly informed our recovery strategy. We believe that employment, if it is decent, can be an important route out of poverty, and also enhances the resilience of economies against shocks. Therefore, the Economic Recovery Plan has employment creation as one of its key pillars. In this regard, it was only on 15 March 2013 that I personally launched the Youth Job Creation Initiative as part of the recovery process. Youth constitute the largest group in the labour market in Malawi, yet they face the most serious challenges when looking for employment or trying to venture into business. This job creation initiative is a programme that is aimed at building skills for youth and creating employment opportunities for them.

I am pleased that my Government, again with the help of the ILO, has developed the employment policy to guide job-creation initiatives. Other recent ILO-supported initiatives in Malawi include: the piloting of the G20 education and skills for employability project; the organization of a very successful high-level policy dialogue on supporting productive employment and decent work, held in October 2012; and a study entitled "The enabling environment for sustainable enterprises in Malawi". All these initiatives have provided valuable input towards the development of our job-creation strategies.

The Decent Work Agenda has also given us the impetus to take a critical look at our social security system. I am pleased to inform you that, for the first time in the history of Malawi, we have enacted the Pension Act, which makes it mandatory for employers to put their workers on pension. I am aware that the coverage of the Act is limited only to formal employees, excluding many other sections of our society. For this reason, my Government, only a few weeks ago, launched an all-embracing social support policy covering all the other vulnerable groups through, among other things, public works programmes.

Considering that over 80 per cent of Malawi's population lives in the rural areas and relies on agriculture, improving the rural sector, therefore, has the potential to greatly reduce poverty. That is why one of the major focuses of my Government is to improve the livelihood of the rural population through a business approach to agriculture. I look at agriculture as a sector that has potential to generate jobs and wealth for many Malawians. In this vein, Malawi will focus on the commercialization, diversification and modernization of the agricultural sector. In fact, I spent a few days in London to witness the announcement of Malawi as a new country partner in the G8 New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition. Through this initiative, Malawi will accelerate private sector investments in the agricultural sector, providing tremendous opportunities for job and work creation. I have also recently announced the establishment of the *Mudzi* (or Village)

Transformation Trust, which will provide accessible, responsive and flexible funds for the implementation of various social and economic projects, to rejuvenate rural economies. Through these initiatives, my Government will provide its citizens with job-creation opportunities.

Let me commend the ILO for supporting Malawi in this area as well. The Organization has two programmes running: one, a pilot programme on decent work for food security, and the other, on freedom of association and collective bargaining in the rural sector in Malawi. I have no doubt that we will continue to work together so as to bring more decent work to our rural sector.

I have come to appreciate more that through social dialogue you can achieve a lot. When I inherited a failing economy, one of the first things I did was to initiate dialogue with Malawians and Malawi's development partners. Through this dialogue, we were able to identify very practical solutions to our economic challenges in the immediate, short and medium term. I am pleased to indicate that, through our dialogue and collaboration, the fruits of the recovery plan have already started to emerge: foreign exchange availability has substantially improved; the local currency has stabilized; and, to some extent, the Malawi kwacha has appreciated against major foreign currencies. As a result, there is consistent availability of fuel supply, companies are now able to import raw materials and other requirements without problems, and the incidence of retrenchments is on the decline. In fact, many companies have scaled up.

Such is the power of engagement and dialogue. It is pleasing to note that the ILO continues to be a strong advocate of this approach in finding solutions to the social and economic challenges facing member States. Indeed, in these times of widespread economic challenges arising from the global financial and economic crisis, the relevance of the ILO today has become glaringly clear.

I will now talk about an important issue that we should consider as we talk about labour issues, and that is the need to intensify efforts against child labour. What a coincidence that I should be here on this day when we are commemorating the World Day Against Child Labour. There can be no better time to raise this issue than today. I strongly believe that children hold the future of any nation. As a mother and as a leader and as a grandmother, I feel that our children must be protected, and I am passionate about this issue. What I am saying is that they deserve total protection and care. I have spent the past 30 years of my life championing the cause of social justice and I feel strongly about the need to protect vulnerable people, especially children.

I am personally concerned that child labour remains a huge problem in most developing countries, including Malawi. This is largely due to the high levels of poverty, among other things. It is evident that when families do not have decent employment that gives them an income, the children in such families will be prone to child labour.

I remember in 2004, when I served as Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, I found out that Malawi was rated as a Tier 2 Watch List country, at least on the international scene, for trafficking in persons. For the first time, I learned about the interconnection between child labour and human trafficking. I found out that children were leaving their homes to work in farms, especially tea and tobacco

estates in other districts, and this constituted not only child labour but also human trafficking. In any case, it is adults who benefit from such work. Hence Malawi's poor Tier 2 Watch List rating at that time. I found this unacceptable and immediately launched a zero tolerance campaign against child labour and child abuse. This helped us move from where we were to Tier 1 rating. I am told, though, since I left, that midway the rating dropped again.

Malawi is still committed to combating the problem of child labour. As such, my Government has developed a national action plan covering the period 2010–16 to guide child labour elimination efforts. In this connection, I am pleased to inform you that we hosted a very successful national conference on child labour in September last year, which I was privileged to open. The conference reaffirmed the urgent need to double our efforts in the fight against child labour. In any case, I suppose that this is the reason why I am in the State House: it is to make sure that I protect Malawians. I am happy with the partnership Malawi has with and through the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour in support of action against child labour in my country. I pledge to continue to champion the zero tolerance to child labour campaign in Malawi and also to intensify programmes to eradicate poverty, which is the root cause of this problem. And I count on the ILO, as an organization, to work with us in this vein.

Let me now turn to an equally important issue in labour matters, and that is the need to look at equitable access to decent work by women and men, equally. Allow me to get personal and talk from my experience. I believe there is nothing that a man is able to do that a woman cannot do. In fact, where I come from, it is the woman who shoulders the biggest responsibility of supporting the family, through her contribution of labour, time, emotions and energy. I strongly believe that our societies need to develop comprehensive strategies to nurture women in the informal and formal labour markets, aim for equal pay for equal work and ensure that women's voices are present in the labour unions. I believe there are capable women at the various levels, and what we need is to provide equal opportunities for them to access employment and to be retained. I want to lead by example. Therefore, in my country, I have promoted at least 100 deserving women into decision-making positions in the last few months. These include: nine Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers; the Head of the Civil Service; the Acting Head of the Judiciary (Chief Justice); three High Court judges; two Deputy Reserve Bank Governors; the Solicitor General; the Deputy Inspector General; 18 Permanent Secretaries; and the list goes on.

I am an African woman, and therefore allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate African men. I happen to know that some parts of the world are still struggling to get a woman into State House. In Africa, we have two. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, has said that the time is going to come when we will even stop counting because there will be many Heads of State that are women.

To show my commitment to securing the voice of women in labour discussions, I specifically directed that, out of the six delegates from the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions that I was going to sponsor, half of them should be women. I believe that it is time for women to take their rightful place in soci-

ety. African men have created space for African women to participate in leadership, and we need to take advantage of that.

I wish to acknowledge the support of some men from other continents as well. And I urge my fellow women to rise to the challenge when these spaces open up. I have learned never to give up, and that is why I am where I am today.

It is my sincere hope that the tripartite constituents gathered here will engage in frank and exhaustive discussions, which result in the adoption of practical recommendations that should provide innovative solutions to social and economic challenges facing our world today in the areas of employment creation, decent work, social security, sustainable development and social dialogue.

As you may be aware, the report of the United Nations (UN) High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has brought to our attention a strong recommendation that, for the world to end poverty by 2030, we need to transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth. The Panel has argued that growth is the only exit from poverty, meaning that we need greater focus on promoting business, entrepreneurship, skills and education. I therefore believe that the discussions that you are having in this Conference are an important aspect of the solutions to the world's challenges. Let us use this platform to shape the post-2015 development architecture.

I believe, in so doing, the ILO will continue to be relevant to member States and remain an important player in social and economic development matters at all levels: global, regional and national.

As an alumna of the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin, Italy, I hold the ILO in very high esteem. I went to Turin for a training course in 1995 while in civil society and the knowledge that I gained from the training has left a mark in my life. I acquired valuable knowledge in livelihood skills that changed the life of my family and that of all those whom I shared and worked with. That is why I would love to see the ILO continue to be a key UN institution through which the world is continually shaped into a better place for everyone to live in.

I remain committed to my Government's continued partnership with the labour movement. I strongly believe that a free and functional labour movement is an important indicator of democracy in a country. That is why I found it compelling to personally attend this year's Labour Day celebrations held under the auspices of the Malawi Con-

gress of Trade Unions and also accepted the invitation to come and address you today. I look forward to my Government's continued engagement with the labour union and the employers' association to ensure that Malawi fulfils all necessary legal and policy requirements for the provision of decent work to its citizens.

Thank you very much for your attention and may God bless you.

---

*Original Arabic:* The PRESIDENT

---

Madam President, thank you for those heartfelt words, which cannot fail to have struck a chord with the participants at the International Labour Conference. We are honoured and proud to have been able to welcome you to the Conference, and to have had the privilege of listening to your address. We have before us not only the first woman President of the Republic of Malawi, but also one of the most influential women in Africa, and indeed in the world.

You have touched our hearts and affected us profoundly, for you have spoken about those who are almost forgotten in the Third World, such as women, children and rural people, who do not have access to opportunities and employment.

Unfortunately, the benefits of development are unfairly distributed throughout the Third World, and there will thus always be a need to give special attention to rural areas, as you have so aptly highlighted.

I hope that during this Conference, we will be able to find new ways of creating job opportunities for those who lack them, including women, children, orphans, abandoned children and those with special needs. The focus should be on rural areas and villages, just as it is on the main cities.

We admire your courageous political path, as well as your commitment to promoting the well-being of women and children to get them out of poverty. These are key issues for the International Labour Organization and for us all.

I should also like to share with you, and with the Conference, the fact that Arab women admire you hugely for all that you have been promoting, socially and politically, in order to help your people to improve their lives.

Madam President, you are yourself the archetypal role model who inspires others to find a way forward to a better world.

Thank you for your kind feelings, and for everything you have done for the world.

*(The Conference adjourned at 11.40 a.m.)*



# CONTENTS

*Page*

*Special sitting*

Address by Her Excellency Dr Joyce Banda, President of the Republic of Malawi..... 1

.....  
• This document is printed in limited numbers to minimize the environmental impact of the ILO's activities and  
• contribute to climate neutrality. Delegates and observers are kindly requested to bring their copies to meetings  
• and to avoid asking for additional ones. All ILC documents are available on the Internet at [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org).  
•  
.....