

AS WRITTEN



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AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE  
OF MALAWI TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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Mr. President,

My delegation associates itself fully with the positions of SADC and Africa. As such, my delegation's remarks will focus mainly on addressing population and development issues in Malawi, which are typical not only of most other sub-Saharan African countries but also of many other developing countries.

Malawi has accorded particular importance to population issues over the past few years. This has been remarkably so since 1994 when the first democratically elected Government assumed **office**. Coincidentally, to us a significant one, while the Cairo Conference took place some months after Malawi's first democratic elections, this Special Session comes about within a month of our second democratic elections.

Just as we did in Cairo, with the stamp of legitimacy that the second elections has brought, my delegation is proud to confidently **reaffirm** Malawi's political commitment to pursuing all the noble objectives aimed at addressing our population and development concerns. The international community made great strides in Cairo, and we must not turn back.

Mr. President,

Malawi adopted a comprehensive National Population Policy in March 1994. Although the Policy preceded the ICPD, it is consistent with the ICPD Programme of Action. Appropriate modifications were subsequently incorporated into an Action Plan for the implementation of the Policy. The Policy and the Action Plan for its implementation have formed the linchpin of Malawi's population programme.

The establishment of a formal capacity for population programme formulation, planning and implementation continues to provide an enabling environment for adhering to the ICPD Programme of Action. We have made all efforts to introduce changes recommended at the Cairo Conference. Our policies and plans have been aimed at promoting an integrated reproductive health (RH) culture, emphasizing gender concerns in development and enhancing advocacy efforts to ensure widespread support for the implementation of the National Population Policy.

Population issues now receive considerable emphasis in all major policy programme documents and have come to figure prominently in the Poverty Alleviation Programme which started in 1994.

The implementation of the National Population Programme has however been constrained by lack of trained personnel, a weak institutional framework as well as inadequate financial resources for the implementing institutions. To-date, there are no adequate institutional structures for co-ordinating the implementation of population activities at the **district** and local levels. Malawi will soon have local elections for District Assemblies, we hope this process will provide political leadership at local levels for effective multisectoral participation in the implementation of the National Population Policy. We remain optimistic that these constraints will be overcome. We are also hopeful that inadequacies in relevant data will be remedied by the census we conducted last year.

Mr. President,

Many achievements have been made in the area of Reproductive Health. Special emphasis has been given to the health of the mother and child and to the reproductive health needs of adolescents. With regard to Family Planning, Malawi adopted in 1996 Family Planning Policy and Contraceptive Guidelines aimed at liberalising family planning services to accommodate all individuals within the reproductive age groups needing such services. The new contraceptive guidelines removed limitations on use of specific methods on the basis of criteria such as parity and age. The new Family Planning Policy also promotes new approaches for accessing and expanding family planning services such as Community Based delivery of contraceptives and social marketing. A Safe Motherhood Plan of Action is being implemented. In addition, following the adoption of the National Youth Policy in 1996, a Youth Adolescent Programme for Reproductive Health has been put in place. During the next five years Malawi intends to accord increasing emphasis on Adolescent Reproductive Health.

Advocacy activities and awareness campaigns already seem to have the desired impact. The contraceptive prevalence rate is currently estimated at almost 20 percent. At the beginning of the decade it was less than 7 per cent. It is an unfortunate reality that Malawi is one of the countries affected seriously by HIV/AIDS pandemic. The fight against HIV/AIDS has been an uphill task. The Government however remains committed to bringing the situation under control, youth programmes will be intensified.

At the same time, we are the first to acknowledge certain limitations. The concept of reproductive health is still not well understood by most health workers. The Government will have a Reproductive Health policy ready before the end of the year. Financial and human resource limitations, have culminated in limited accessibility to and availability of family planning services in the country.

Mr. President,

Gender equality and equity have been **recognised** as the ***sine qua non*** for healthy reproductive decision-making. The Government is committed to the empowerment of women and elimination of gender discrimination. In this regard, a number of actions have been undertaken to address gender issues. Legal reforms have been introduced to amend laws which allowed gender **discriminatory** practices. These include reforms to the Affiliation Act, the Marriage Act and the Wills and Inheritance Act. The Constitution also offers sufficient and superior guarantees.

Under the Constitution, women have the right to full and equal protection of the law and the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of gender or marital status. In an effort to institutionalize gender and development, Malawi has put in place the National Gender Machinery for the overall co-ordination of gender policy formulation, implementation and mainstreaming of gender in all sectors and programmes. Malawi has drafted a National Gender Policy. It sets forth guidelines for **recognising** and addressing gender concerns and for mainstreaming gender in all development programmes.

With regard to education, a number of interventions are being implemented to protect the girl child. With the introduction of free primary education in 1994 girls' enrollment has risen by 50 per cent.

Related to this, a policy change has been effected allowing girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy to be readmitted into school. A Girls Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE) Social Mobilisation Campaign on the importance of girl's education is conducted nationwide since 1998. Population education is being incorporated in the formal school curriculum. In addition gender balancing is being done so that books and materials portray balanced images of women and men, girls and boys in all aspects of life. To address some of the economic disparities between men and women, micro finance institutions have been established to promote economic empowerment by providing credit facilities to women.

Despite these achievements, the implementation of gender and development programmes has been constrained by various institutional and structural problems including a weak resource base, and limited trained personnel in gender issues.

Mr. President,

Malawi **recognises** the potential contribution of the **NGOs** and the private sector in the formulation and implementation of population policies and programmes. The **NGOs** have participated in the formulation of the national population policy. They are also involved in the implementation of the policy and programme in areas such as family planning provision and counseling, youth and adolescent reproductive health services, and motivation training.

It is the intention of Government to come up with a clear national strategy for harnessing the **full** potential of the **NGOs** and the private sector in this area.

As we conduct this ICPD review and appraisal, Malawi has a clear idea of what it has to do in the next five years. More importantly there is a political will to address all manifestations of our population and development concerns. We sincerely appeal to all our co-operating partners to continue assisting us in the implementation of our programmes. Most of the programmes to\_ be meaningfully implemented require substantial financial outlays. We are hopeful that today, after dotting the i's and crossing the x's, after long hours of arduous work, we will together send a strong political and moral message that we are ready to address resolutely all the population and development issues of our time; that we have, five years post Cairo, made the ICPD Programme of Action stronger.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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