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Transcript

Good Governance, Growth and Human Rights: A Vision for Malawi's Development

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President of Malawi

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President Banda:

I am delighted to be back here at the distinguished centre of excellence - The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House - where I have been asked to speak on the subject, 'Good Governance, Growth and Human Rights: A vision for Malawi's Development'.

Today's topic features good governance and development, which are mutually reinforcing in engendering the protection of human rights.

I came to the United Kingdom to join the people of Scotland and England in celebrating the life of Dr David Livingstone, who fought the slave trade and brought Christianity and commerce to Malawi. This is a timely and appropriate topic.

There is a stubborn link between governance, growth and human rights. One cannot meaningfully achieve one without the others. Good political and economic governance are the foundation for people to realign themselves for sustainable development. Human rights guarantees fairness, equity and freedoms. When good governance and observance of human rights are respected, people are able to attain sustainable growth.

As you know, Malawi has been caught in a vicious cycle of underdevelopment.

In the 1960s to late 1970s Malawi, under late President Dr Hastings Banda, registered impressive growth and was referred to by some international commentators as a star performer. However, when slippages in human rights and good governance started surfacing the country lost its dignity and by 1992 Malawi was completely isolated. Donors had withdrawn support and investors had either scaled down or completely withdrawn.

The second administration, in 1994, under the leadership of President Dr Bakili Muluzi performed impressively well during its first term and the country registered growth by as high as 9%. However, during the second term of his administration, the country once again declined: donors withdrew support, the civil society and faith community were fighting in defence of the constitution, the private sector scaled down production and the economy had almost collapsed by the time Malawians went to the polls in 2004.

The late President Professor Bingu wa Mutharika took over a stressed economy with negative growth but thanks to the hard work of his administration the donors that had left came back, the economy recovered and both local and international relations were restored. There was relief again in the country.

During his second term, the problems reemerged: there was shortage of fuel and accusations of political and economic mismanagement. Once again many donors left and the country was left isolated.

Now I am in State House and people are asking themselves questions: will history repeat itself? Will donors run away again? Will political intolerance return? Will Malawi be isolated again?

These are important questions and need honest answers if Malawians are to come out of the vicious cycle of underdevelopment. The people of Malawi have demonstrated their commitment to constitutionalism and the Rule of Law. Civil society, the faith community, and the institutions of governance are strong in Malawi. They resisted dictatorship, demanded their freedoms and upheld the constitution. But we may ask, why then is the country caught up in such a vicious cycle?

The people of Malawi have made a decisive choice: they have chosen democracy, they have chosen peace and they have chosen to work together to realize their destiny. It is my people's courage and determination that has taken me into the presidency, and which we will now apply to our national development.

The biggest threats to governance, growth and human rights are poverty, lack of opportunity and lack of hope. It is unacceptable to me as the President of Malawi, as it should be to the global community, that we have children continuing to suffer from malnutrition. Or that they yearn to learn, but have to sit under trees rather than proper classrooms. It is unacceptable that a mother should die while giving birth because the nearest health centre is far away. Or that thousands die of diseases that we have answers for. It is unacceptable that the youth who represent the future of our world have so few opportunities to realize their potential. Or that they are not guaranteed a society where they can speak their minds. It is unacceptable that farmers and other workers continue to toil to make the best of what they have but do not get the fruits of their labour due to the lack of modernization, a supportive policy environment and access to markets; and that they are buried under global tariffs and taxes.

It is when these frustrations are in place that conflict takes root.

For many years, I have fought these issues in Malawi as a human rights activist and through my work at the grassroots. I have experienced the struggles of the poor and the suffering of a Malawian woman. I have championed the advancement of the oppressed and marginalized, fought for the rights of women and children, campaigned for the betterment of the rural

and urban poor. I have asked these questions that our people are asking: why are we still poor when we have so many resources? Why is State House so sweet that president's refuse to leave when their times are over?

Now, as the President of the Republic of Malawi, I have a vision. My vision is to eradicate poverty through economic growth and wealth creation. We aim to create wealth by transforming the structure of the economy, promoting the private sector in order to achieve economic growth, accelerate job creation and protect the vulnerable and the excluded within a decentralized and democratic environment.

My vision, specifically, is to transform Malawi to become the fastest growing African economy in the next decade. For me, growth is not merely GDP growth. Growth is about wealth and prosperity for all, opportunity for all, happiness for all, political and economic freedom for all. Growth is also about growing the number of children in school, and young people in jobs.

Growth is about growing the number of mothers who give safe birth in hospital, and growing the number of families who have plenty of food.

As you may be aware, for the past three years Malawi faced severe economic and social challenges brought by poor political and economic governance, and this could have impacted negatively on our ability to accelerate the attainment of sustainable development. Therefore, upon assuming office, I immediately put in place an Economic Recovery Programme to restore macroeconomic stability in the country, so that we may address our immediate macroeconomic issues but also secure Malawi's ability to grow.

My government realizes that the potential of Malawi is great—the potential of our land, our resources and most importantly of our people. But this opportunity will only be seized through our own efforts. This is why my vision is not just hopeful words. Our willingness to take tough decisions does not end here; our plans need to be translated into action. To this end my government held an inclusive National Dialogue on the economy to narrow down five priorities within our medium term national development framework, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS II). The five priorities are: Energy, Tourism, Agriculture, Mining, Energy and Infrastructure Development.

Central to these priorities is our emphasis on delivery through partnership with the private sector. We have initiated changes to the business climate.

My cabinet has identified three specific projects within each priority for our focus and translated this into an implementation plan for the next two years.

These projects range from completion of essential roads and rail lines to setting up an alternative energy source, undertaking business climate reform to attracting investment into agro-processing and mining. These will set our country on a path of fulfilling its potential. In addition, I have also launched two Presidential Initiatives – on Maternal Health and on Poverty and Hunger Reduction.

Malawi refuses to remain being classified as a least developed. We are committed to changing this perception. But in doing this, my government and indeed the people of Malawi know that we need to engage the rest of the global community.

Within days of taking office, I re-opened dialogue and engagement with our neighbours; with African leaders and indeed the rest of the world. We are grateful for the goodwill that many have shown us and we encouraged by the support of our partners.

Malawi has started a journey to prosperity—the journey to respect human rights; the journey to observe good political and economic governance; the journey for sustainable development. Our destiny is:

- A Malawi sustained by a growing economy capable of extending sustainable and equitable benefits to all our people.
- A Malawi that is food secure with a modernized, commercialized and industrialized agriculture where farming is managed as a business.
- A Malawi that has expanded irrigation agriculture of two growing seasons a year.
- A Malawi generating enough power to support both domestic and industrial needs.
- A Malawi that is a world class destination for tourism with a vibrant culture and thriving art industry.
- A Malawi that has a developed mining industry where its citizens are primary beneficiaries of the resources.
- A Malawi where roads and railways criss-cross the length and breadth of the country;
- Where its airports are a hub for the regional and international transportation networks.
- A Malawi that has a healthy population, well trained and skilled workforce.

Yes, Mr Chairman, it is possible to build a Malawi that respects human rights, good political and economic governance to foster sustainable growth.