



REPUBLIC OF MALAWI

**SIXTH NATIONAL ADDRESS
ON THE WAR ON COVID-19**

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY
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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI**

**DELIVERED
AT KAMUZU PALACE**

**ON
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Fellow Malawians,

Every week, I use these weekly updates to inform you of the actions we have taken in the last seven days to save the lives of those infected with Covid-19 and to stop the spread of the virus. On these matters, let me say in passing that of the 11,899 people tested this past week, 2,011 were positive for Covid-19, which is a positivity rate of 16.9%, 6% lower than it was the week before and over half of what it was at the start of the year.

We must therefore continue complying with the preventive measures we have put in place across the country so that the positivity rate continues to drop until it is below 5%, which is when we can safely open up the economy again. Similarly, I applaud our frontline health workers for registering 2,202 recoveries in the past week alone. Given the critical role that our health workers are playing in saving lives, today I announce

that 100,000 additional AstraZeneca vaccines secured through the African Union will arrive in the country within a week for the protection of our health workers.

This consignment for health workers is different from the one arriving at the end of the month for the general population. In providing vaccine protection from Covid-19, health workers must be first in line because they are our last line of defense. They put their lives at risk to save lives every day and they share in the devastation we feel from losing loved ones to this virus, including the 100 people who have died of Covid-19 this past week. May their souls rest in peace.

Every Covid-19 death is tragic and to be mourned, and although it is God who ultimately has power over life and death, the deaths that are preventable are even more heartbreaking. We therefore have a moral and civic duty to do everything we can to ensure that no penny meant for saving lives is stolen, or abused, or wasted by

anybody. Last week, I expressed my outrage over the alleged abuse of funds and lack of financial accountability for the same by certain clusters entrusted with 6.2 billion Kwacha for tackling the pandemic. These were abuses brought to light by an independent report released by the Office of the Ombudsman in November 2020 after investigating the matter. As you recall, last week I gave the heads of those clusters and controlling officers 48 hours to appear before my Covid-19 Taskforce with their reports on how they spent the 6.2 billion Kwacha disbursed to them in the amounts I outlined in my address of January 17th.

Today, I can report, without fear or favor, that when those cluster heads and controlling officers appeared before my Taskforce on Tuesday as I directed, it was evident that many clusters are poorly led and require corrective measures. All cluster heads, with the exception one, submitted reports with no backing

documents and had to be told on-site to bring backing documents. Mind you, these are reports of money that was mostly spent last year, whose backing documents ought to have been maintained regularly as a matter of best practice, and yet cluster heads appeared before my Taskforce showing clear signs of negligence and lack of preparation.

In fact, in addition to the 6.2 billion Kwacha that must be accounted for from last year, on January 24th of this year I announced the release of an additional 17.52 billion to be used in fighting the second wave of the virus. To make sure that this new disbursement would be more closely monitored, I gave a directive in that address when I said, “I wish to state that the heads of these clusters will be required to submit to my office a report of their expenditure every week... [and] I will immediately deal with any cluster that fails to do this.” Today, three weeks later, there are at least 12 clusters

that have not even begun to do this. When these two offences are considered together, namely showing up with a substandard report that has no backing documents and defying a presidential directive to submit reports on a weekly basis, there is no cluster that is blameless. So, as a matter of first importance, I have directed the Secretary to the President and Cabinet to effect the immediate suspension of all cluster heads, some for failing to maintain proper records of how such critical funds were used and others for defying my directive to submit reports weekly to my office. The suspensions will pave way for a full forensic audit, which the National Audit Office has already begun, and a full and independent investigation, which the Director of Public Prosecutions has requested the Malawi Police Service to conduct as a matter of urgency.

Secondly, the reports submitted by clusters and the scrutiny that has followed has come to the technical leadership of the Covid-19 Taskforce and the technical leadership of DODMA months after the spending was already done, which shows a lack of toughness by those leaders in demanding accountability in the course of spending. As a result, the red spending flags raised by the Ombudman's November report were missed and left unchecked by both the technical leads of DODMA and the Covid-19 Taskforce, who report directly to me. As such, I have also directed the Secretary to the President and Cabinet to effect the replacement of both the Commissioner of DODMA and the technical co-chair of the Taskforce on Covid-19. Both DODMA and the Covid-19 Taskforce require strong leadership, and my office will be naming a new Commissioner for DODMA soon, while for the Covid-19 Taskforce, I have named Dr. Chalamira Nkhoma as the new co-chair.

Dr. Nkhoma is an epidemiologist of impeccable credentials. He comes to this role with 13 years experience in the Ministry of Health, where he served as TB Control Program Manager, Director for Preventive Health Services, and Director of the National AIDS Control Program. He also served as Acting Country Representative for the World Health Organization in Lesotho, Senior Public Health Advisor for the World Health Organization for the past 21 years, and Fellow of the Royal Society of Public Health of UK. He has my full confidence in leading our fight.

Notwithstanding, I want to thank the Dr. John Phuka, the outgoing co-chair of the Taskforce, and Mr. James Chiusiwa, the outgoing Commissioner of DODMA, for their hard work in containing this pandemic. We owe them both a debt of gratitude for their service. The gains we have registered in the past few weeks to contain this wave are gains they can both be proud of. But apart from

a change of leadership, I will be strengthening the vigilance of the Covid-19 Taskforce as a whole by adding to it representatives of Civil Society Organizations and watchdog bodies like the Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Malawi Human Rights Commission, all of whom have already shown great initiative in wanting to be part of the solution.

I have made these decisions to address accountability lapses at the helm of all clusters, at the helm of DODMA, and at the helm of the Covid-19 Taskforce. However, there remains the need to address alleged elements of criminal conduct by those who abused or misappropriated funds. As enshrined in the Constitution, these are matters for independent law enforcement agents and forensic auditors, who will do their work independently to pin down the culprits. Whether the independent audit and police investigation find the culprits of fraud, abuse, and misappropriation

to be individuals at District Councils, or at DODMA, or at District Health Offices, they will be prosecuted accordingly, and I trust our independent Judiciary will do its part to mete out justice.

Before I go, I must address an even bigger problem. We all know that the rot we have all expressed outrage about goes deeper than Covid-19 funds. If we are going to root out the problem of waste, abuse, and theft of public resources, we must admit that these are behaviors that have poisoned our values as a nation and have corroded our entire government system. In fact, over the past 27 years, the government system has been rigged with bad or old laws, procedures, policies, and contracts that are cleverly designed to not only facilitate waste, abuse, and theft, but to also protect those who engage in these acts from being fired or prosecuted. The three government systems through which this behavior is perpetuated are the system of allowances, the system of procurement,

and the system of civil servant's employment contracts. These three systems are used by system insiders to loot with impunity.

I spoke about this looting scheme in the government system in my radio address of July 25th, 2020, less than a month after I took office. My exact words on that occasion were that based on last year's report from the Auditor General, "there is no Government Ministry, Department, or Agency where the culture of impunity for wastage, misappropriation, and theft is not entrenched. And so we cannot afford to deal with corruption selectively by focusing on the tip of the iceberg. It is the whole system that is corrupt and therefore it is the whole system we must clean up."

To clean up the system as a whole, we must conduct a comprehensive review and overhaul of the three government systems of allowances, of procurement, and

of employment contracts. That is the public sector reform that this country needs most urgently. I am therefore delegating to the Vice-President, Right Honorable Dr. Saulos Klaus Chilima, in his capacity as Minister of Public Sector Reforms, together with a special Taskforce he will form in consultation with me, to begin and prioritize a review of these three government systems and submit recommendations for their overhaul to my office within three months. The recommendations must include any legislative changes we must make in our laws at one of the sittings of Parliament this year so that our laws protect the interests and resources of the public, not the rubble of public servants who use broken systems to loot and use bad laws and contracts to keep their jobs in the system and keep looting. The recommendations must also include a restructuring of the civil service to be more efficient and of civil servants' conditions of service so

that the good people in the system are well supported and not able to use poor pay as an excuse for wasting, abusing, and stealing public resources. This systemic review and overhaul will be resisted by so many who are benefiting from the looting, including greedy politicians from all our political parties, greedy businesses from the private sector, and greedy civil servants they partner with inside the machinery. But it is a battle they will not win. They will not win because you, the Malawian people, put me here to bring this kind of radical change, and whether anyone likes it or not, change has come.

Thank you for listening.

God bless you and God bless Malawi.