



REPUBLIC OF MALAWI

NATIONAL ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI**

DELIVERED

AT KAMUZU PALACE

ON

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Fellow Malawians,

Five days ago, I declared a state of national disaster in all 28 districts of Malawi in response to the recent spike in Covid-19 cases. For your information, the status of the spike since the start of the New Year is as follows:

- 1. This year alone, a total of 21,064 Covid-19 tests have been conducted across the country. This means that of all the tests our testing sites have conducted since the virus entered Malawi nine months ago, 20% have been conducted in the past sixteen days alone as per my directive to scale up testing to meet the recent sharp rise in demand.**
- 2. This year alone, a total of 5,091 people have tested positive for Covid-19 across the country. This means that of all the people confirmed to have contracted the virus since April last year, 43% have been found with the virus this year alone, showing a sharp rise in infections and a lapse in prevention.**

3. This year alone, a total of 111 people have died from Covid-19, an average of 7 per day. This means that of all the deaths from Covid-19 in the past 9 months, over a third have happened in the past 16 days, showing a sharp rise in fatalities.

In view of my declaration of a state of national disaster in response to these spikes, I formed a Committee of seven Ministries and directed that it meets with the Vice-President to review existing Covid-19 guidelines and recommend changes to my Taskforce on Covid-19. That ad hoc committee met all day Wednesday, while my Taskforce itself met all day Thursday. Since then, I have consulted various institutions and experts to consolidate all our best ideas into a coherent strategy that I now wish to bring to your attention.

Here are the actions I have so far taken with my Covid-19 Taskforce to curb this pandemic, and the additional actions I have directed to be taken immediately to confront the recent spike:

1. ON THE FUNDING FOR COVID-19

- **A few weeks after I came into office, my Administration released 6.2 billion kwacha for use by the Covid-19 Taskforce in combating the pandemic. In the months between then and now, these monies have been used by the various clusters of the Taskforce as follows: 60 million has been used by the Coordination Cluster to facilitate planning meetings and monitoring and evaluation visits countrywide; 535 million has been used by the Department of Disaster Management Affairs to facilitate screening, testing, feeding, sanitation, security, transportation, and lodging of 19,858**

Malawians who have thus far come back home from South Africa; 185 million has been used by the Public Communication Cluster to raise public awareness about Covid-19 on all media platforms; 580 million has been used by the Security and Enforcement Cluster for joint border patrols and the enforcement of border preventive measures by the Malawi Police Service, Immigration, Malawi Prison Service, National Intelligence Service, Malawi Revenue Authority, and the Judiciary; 72 million has been used by the Protection and Social Support Cluster to sensitize the public on the increased risks and evils of gender-based violence during the pandemic, as well as to support victims and their families with materials and cash transfers; 100 million has been used by the Education Cluster to procure protective and disinfection

supplies for schools; 50 million has been used by the Employment and Labour Force Protection Cluster for efforts to monitor and enforce Covid-19 protocols in the workplace, while another 50 million has been used by the Shelter and Camp Management Cluster for activities to map the strategic places for establishing isolation centers. The lions share of the funds were used by the Health and the Local Government Clusters, which spent 3 billion and 1.4 billion Kwacha respectively. This was used to purchase personal protective equipment (PPEs), set up emergency treatment units, procure oxygen and medical supplies for treatment, maintain district isolation centers, and enforce contact tracing protocols in councils. The 30 million that was allocated to the Agriculture Cluster was not spent, nor was

the remaining 3 million which was not allocated. This is how Covid-19 funds have been spent so far.

- **All these clusters need additional funding to respond effectively to the new wave of infections. I have therefore directed the Minister of Finance to allocate 17.52 billion Kwacha as soon as possible to the Covid-19 Taskforce for distribution to nine clusters to meet the demands of the current disaster. I have also approved the allocation of 100 million Kwacha to the Christian Hospitals Association of Malawi (CHAM) to supplement the efforts of public hospitals in fighting the pandemic, in addition to the support that Government is giving in the form of wages for CHAM healthcare workers and an additional 150 medical personnel for CHAM facilities. I want to make it**

clear that I expect no excuses and delays from the Treasury in availing these funds as a matter of urgency. I will entertain no bureaucratic or administrative justifications for delaying the release of these funds to save lives.

2. ON THE MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 CASES

- The first priority for the expenditure of these funds will be managing the recent surge of hospitalizations and providing emergency care to the critically sick. The money allocated to the clusters dealing with this priority will immediately go towards meeting four urgent needs: tracking the spread and severity of the pandemic through testing and tracing; recruiting additional medical personnel; procuring medical equipment; and increasing**

admission space and infrastructure. Let me unpack each of the four:

- **When it comes to testing for Covid-19, I found 39 Testing Sites across the country when I came into office at the end of June. By the end of December, we had already scaled this up to 143 testing sites. But because of the increased demand for tests, the Taskforce will use some of the funds to set up an additional 77 testing sites in the next two weeks.**

Similarly, from this coming week, the Taskforce will increase the number of stations for the emergency Toll-free number that members of the public can call when in distress due to a suspected Covid-19 case. This increase will go from 5

workstations to 22 workstations, and I have directed the Minister of Information to ensure that MACRA facilitates the usage of the same number on both telecommunication platforms, not two different numbers as has been the case.

Additionally, to help the public stay aware of the severity of the pandemic and what measures to expect to be in force at different points, we have developed a 5-tier system for tracking the progression of the pandemic and the measures to be enforced with each level. The Ministries of Information and Civic Education will make simple and useful infographics of the 5 levels of pandemic severity available to the public on all media platforms within the

next 48 hours and in all public buildings by the end of the month. The severity of the pandemic will be announced everyday at the start of a media briefing that the Minister of Health or the co-Chair of the Covid-19 Taskforce will hold at a consistent hour every day. Meanwhile, I myself will address you briefly every Sunday night to update you on the impacts of our interventions and any changes you should expect in the emerging week, since the pandemic is dynamic phenomenon that requires a delicate balance between flexibility and consistency at every stage.

- **When it comes to recruiting additional medical personnel, our medical facilities are terribly understaffed, and our medical personnel are outnumbered. To address**

this chronic shortfall, part of this new injection of funding will facilitate the recruitment of an additional 1,380 medical personnel in four different categories at a cost of 1.6 billion Kwacha over the next four months. The four categories to be recruited are newly graduated interns, healthcare workers for Local Government Services Commission, CHAM workers, and staff for Central Hospitals.

- **When it comes to procuring medical equipment and supplies, the new injection of funding will prioritize the following: immediate procurement of personal protective equipment (PPEs) for all frontline health workers so that we do not lose any of these heroes to the pandemic; immediate procurement of 1000 cylinders**

of Oxygen, along with the adequate number of accessories like flow meters and patient monitors, which must be in-country by the end of the week, even by chartered plane if need be; immediate procurement of 1000 beds, including 50 to 100 specialized ICU beds; immediate procurement of Non-Invasive Ventilators to assist those having difficulty breathing on their own; immediate procurement of 50,000 testing kits to meet the projected demand for the next four months. I must also mention that the maintenance of oxygen plants in Nkhatabay and at Kamuzu Central Hospital are already underway.

- **When it comes to the need to increase admission space and infrastructure in the medical facilities, the situation is quite**

desperate. Although in my six months in office, we set up 400 national treatment units, the current wave of infections has completely overwhelmed these facilities. As such, this new injection of funds will facilitate the immediate procurement of temporary structures like tents and prefabricated treatment units to be erected on existing treatment sites. My specific directive to the Taskforce in this regard is to scale up the number of treatment units from 400 to 1500 over the next month. Among these should be a 300-bed capacity field hospital at Blantyre Youth Center, another 300-bed capacity field hospital at Bingu National Stadium, a 200-bed capacity emergency treatment unit in Mzuzu, and

100-bed capacity field hospital in Zomba at the Zomba State House.

The needs are many and urgent, and we as Government will do what we can with the resources you have entrusted to us to defeat this enemy. But Government resources are not enough.

I therefore applaud the efforts of private citizens who are already running capital campaigns to raise money to go towards these needs. I would like to call on private sector companies to follow this example and practice their corporate social responsibility in this critical hour. If the Malawian people have been there for your business and given your company profits, you own the Malawian people life-saving

support during this dark hour. We need all hands on deck.

3. ON THE CONTAINMENT OF THE PANDEMIC

- **While we make all these efforts to save as many lives as we can, it is critically important that we stop the occurrence of new infections. This is where you as citizens have a vital role to play. But we can no longer leave preventive behaviors like wearing masks, washing hands, and complying with safety protocols to chance or personal choice. The time has come to enforce these things for the common good. For this reason, all schools will close for three weeks, but students in boarding schools will remain in their respective campuses until health authorities assess the severity of infection in those schools to determine whether it is safe for**

those students to go home. During this time of containment in boarding schools, the Taskforce will provide additional support to the schools to manage the students' transition there, including communication with their guardians and parents.

Additionally, I have directed the Minister of Justice to gazette tomorrow the new guidelines recommended by the Ministerial Committee that the Vice-President convened during the week. The new rules include, but are not limited to, the following:

- All drinking places must close no later than 8pm, and must not allow the consumption of their goods on their premises. The same applies to all places of business. This will be strictly enforced.**

- **Markets must close no later than 5pm, and all merchants and customers must wear a mask at all times.**
- **All buildings used by the public, whether for business or public service, must be disinfected no less than once a week, and must be fitted with handwashing facilities at the entrance and exits.**
- **Any person found in public by law enforcement authorities without a mask will be fined.**
- **No person must be found wandering around socially between 9pm and 5am.**
- **Employers must reorganize their employees to work in shifts if the work requires physical presence, and to work from home for the next three weeks if it does not.**

- **Religious gatherings and all gatherings in general must have no more than 50 people under the strictest Covid-19 compliance certified and regulated by the local Council.**

In tomorrow's daily briefing, the Minister of Health will outline the other regulations to be enforced after they have been gazetted.

In conclusion, let me say in no uncertain terms that these measures require that we accept some hard truths.

- 1. We must all accept that Covid-19 is here, that it will be here for some time, that it is real, and that it kills. Those of you talking about this virus like it is far away or like it will magically disappear must stop.**

2. We must all accept that as a country, we do not have unlimited amounts of money to do whatever we fancy. Some in this country are in the habit of making proposals that require billions in funds without stating where such funds will come from. As a nation, this luxury of living in fantasy land is one we do not have. We must make all our decisions within the reality of our situation, and our situation is that we are a country with a debt of 4.1 trillion, and so we do not have all the money in the world to fight this pandemic.

3. We must all accept that the scale of the pandemic demands a change of priorities. This is important to say because there are some who are still obsessed with politics, some who are still obsessed with cabinet appointments and reshuffles, and some who are still obsessed with campaign promises that were made on assumptions and in conditions that no

longer hold. When a ship is at sea and it comes across unexpected rapids and is hit by an expected storm, only a foolish captain would insist on maintaining the same course.

4. We must all accept that our health facilities do not have the capacity to treat the numbers of people being infected. Because of decades of neglect and plunder in the health sector, this pandemic has found us at a time when our hospitals and clinics are in a sorry state. The dysfunctions of the health sector are systemic, and so, by their very nature, they will take years of investment and discipline to fix. For this reason, we must accept that any measures we put in place now to relieve the pressure our health facilities are under will be temporary and imperfect at best. We should therefore not expect that everyone who needs a test or medical attention for Covid-19 will get it, or that those who get it will

get the best care, or that everyone who gets treated will survive.

5. We must all accept that this virus is being spread by our behavior. No matter how many policies, or law-enforcement protocols, or treatment programs the Government puts in place, the virus will continue to spread and to kill the most vulnerable among us if our behavior does not change.

As I speak, there are people watching this broadcast in a drinking place, even though the Covid rules require these to be close by 8pm. This selfish and careless behavior must stop.

There are people watching this broadcast surrounded by others with no social distancing. This selfish and careless behavior must stop.

There are people watching this broadcast in a public place without a mask on. This selfish and careless behavior must stop.

There are people watching this broadcast in a public place wearing a mask that only covers their mouth and not their nose. This selfish and careless behavior must stop.

There are people watching this broadcast who still greet others by shaking hands, and some who have not washed their hands in the past hour. This selfish and careless behavior must stop.

There are people watching this broadcast who have symptoms of a sickness but are still planning to go to work tomorrow morning. This selfish and careless behavior must stop.

There are people watching this broadcast who lost a friend or relation to Covid-19 and attended the funeral or visited the home of the bereaved in large numbers and without observing preventive measures. This selfish and careless behavior must stop.

There are people watching this broadcast who have tested positive or suspect they are positive for Covid-19, but who have not informed those they have been in direct contact with so that they can also isolate themselves. This selfish and careless behavior must stop.

There are people watching this broadcast who went to a church gathering today with more people in attendance than the law allows and with not safety

measures in place. This selfish and careless behavior must stop.

It is only by accepting these contextual realities and ending the selfish and careless behaviors fueling the pandemic at individual and communal levels that the government policies and strategies I have outlined can give us a fighting chance. I trust that you will change and call out others around you who are not compliant. We must be our brother's and sister's keeper.

God bless you and God bless Malawi.