



Statement By

His Excellency Dr. Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera,

President of the Republic of Malawi,

At the Swearing-in Ceremony Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers.

Bingu International Convention Centre

Friday, 10th July, 2020

Fellow Malawians,

Two days ago, Dr. Chilima and I concluded our consultations on the formation of the first Tonse Cabinet. I then directed the Chief Secretary to make the list of Cabinet appointees public through a press release. That list has since generated both public interest and a public outcry so great that members of the Civil Society came to see me yesterday to present a number of concerns from around the country regarding the new Cabinet. Since the appointees are gathered here today, I would like to address the concerns in their presence.

First, it is alleged that it is wrong to appoint to Cabinet members of the same family, or two people that are married to each other, or several people from the same region. I want to assure all Malawians that in making any appointments, I will never consider what family or region one comes from nor whom one is married to. I believe that a just society is not only one in which familial, regional, and marital ties do not qualify you for service, but also one in which those ties do not disqualify you for service.

The only thing that counts is merit, but here I must hasten to add how merit is defined in our Tonse Philosophy, because for far too long, we have defined merit wrongly in this country. For far too long, we have reduced merit to academic credentials and social media populism, but I think it is now indisputable that

we have many educated and popular people who are either untested or failures in political leadership. To be a Minister of Government is to accept the responsibility of national and political leadership. That responsibility should only be offered to someone on merit, where merit means *a proven track record to lead people effectively in producing results in the face of formidable odds and political complexities*. There is no one on this Cabinet who does not pass that test.

Now, does that mean they are the only ones who pass that test? Of course not! Rather, they have been chosen from among many who qualify because their combination is a representation of the strategic strengths of the member parties of the Tonse Alliance, of which they were instrumental architects and which the Malawian people voted for. As such, the fact that there are qualified people excluded from this Cabinet does not negate the qualities of the ones here included.

Secondly, it has been said that this Cabinet does not empower women or persons with disabilities, because there appear to be no ministries dedicated to these. However, these are only absent in name, not in fact. While it may have been the practice of the previous Administration to neglect any areas not appearing on the cabinet list by name, that kind of tokenism is not part of the Tonse Philosophy. As a case in point, the previous Administration indeed had a Ministry of Gender, but among its many failures was the failure to condemn and investigate the rape of women in a

village outside the capital despite having a cabinet portfolio. A name is not as important as outcomes.

Our approach is to place issues of gender and disability within the Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare with a fully empowered and resourced Principal Secretary solely dedicated to address them with a view to reaching specific measurable benchmarks. This is because our Tonse Philosophy compels us to move away from paying lip service to the plight of women, children, and persons with disability as a publicity stunt, and to instead focus on alleviating that plight. Our commitment is to tackle these issues as a collective responsibility, not the responsibility of a single ministry. That is why I wanted to lead by example by having a greater percentage of women in my Cabinet than any President in recent memory. Notwithstanding, for avoidance of any doubt about my commitment, I have directed the Chief Secretary to rename the Ministry accordingly in response to an appeal from stakeholders. Additionally, I have taken note of the observation that the women who are on my Cabinet are mostly there as deputies and will increase the number of women who are full Ministers when I restructure my Administration at the end of the five-month transition as I planned.

In the meantime, let me state in passing that the Ministry of Agriculture will have a Principal Secretary solely dedicated to Water Management, just as we will

have a full-fledged Principal Secretary for Climate Change in the Ministry of Forestry and Natural Resources. I should also mention that matters of Disaster Management will be handled by my office as President, especially in view of the need to maintain vigilance against the Covid-19 pandemic at the highest level of my administration.

Thirdly, it has been pointed out, correctly I might add, that the law does not give me power to appoint a Commissioner General and Deputy Commissioner General for Malawi Revenue Authority. What the press release on the appointments did not mention is that because such appointments are the domain of the Board of MRA, my appointments are only made to function in an acting capacity until the Board is reconstituted and in place to make permanent appointments. I have made these provisional appointments to stop the free-for-all pilferage of taxes and the destruction of evidence that have been taking place there in the last few weeks, crimes which need to be stopped as a matter of urgency. As for the appointment of the Deputy Inspector General, it has duly been withheld pending a regularization process, and I commend all of you who noted the anomaly.

Lastly, it has been pointed out that several of my Cabinet appointees have conflicts of interest. I would like to assure you all that I am fully aware of these interests, for I did a thorough background check on each candidate. Since my Cabinet appointees are

accomplished individuals in their own right, it was inevitable that they would have conflicts of interest by virtue of those accomplishments; accomplishments which also form part of their qualification. However, rather than seeing such interests and accomplishments as a disqualifying mark, I elected to have the Chief Secretary devise a special code of conduct that will keep my Cabinet members from using their public office for the advancement of those private interests.

This brings me to my message to the Cabinet appointees here present. I want you to hear me and to hear me clearly: I have seen each of you leading others and working hard, doing so in the spirit of serving Malawians and building the Tonse philosophy when many odds were stacked against its success. It has pleased me to appoint you as Ministers and Deputy Ministers in my Transitional Cabinet to lay the groundwork for a Tonse approach to managing government affairs. The ministries you have been assigned to are in a mess, characterized by wanton wastage of resources, greedy monopoly in the awarding of contracts, incompetence in the standard of work, and multiple systemic inefficiencies.

You each have five months to produce results that will give Malawians confidence that change has come. At the end of that period, you will each give a report to Malawians publicly on your progress in each of the key performance indicators that I will give you. At the start

of the New Year, I will shortlist those of you whose performance I find satisfactory and include you among those who will be publicly interviewed for a year-long appointment on my 2021 Cabinet.

As you already know, many Malawians are not as persuaded as I am that you are the right people for this job. The onus is on you to prove them wrong and to reaffirm me in my confidence that you have what it takes to deliver the Tonse Transformation that Malawians have long cried, prayed, and fought for. Should you prove the sceptics right by being lazy, abusive, wasteful, arrogant, extravagant, divisive, and corrupt, I will not hesitate to have you replaced. Contrary to public opinion, I am not beholden to any of you, nor do I have any of you to appease, for I owe both my election and allegiance to God and the Malawian people. May God's Spirit rest upon you as you take your oath to serve them.

I thank you for your attention. May God bless you and bless our Republic.