



## **A CALL TO HEARKEN TO THE CRY OF POOR MALAWIANS**

### ***A PASTORAL STATEMENT BY THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF MALAWI***

**10<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

#### **Preamble**

We, the Catholic Bishops in Malawi once again, as we have done many times before at critical junctures of our country, have, since our last Pastoral Letter, prayerfully reflected on the realities of our times and our aspirations as Malawians. Through such a prayerful reflection we have heard, as any honest and well-meaning person would hear in the present circumstances, the desperate and ever-intensifying cry of the poor. We as pastors cannot but identify ourselves with such cries as indeed “the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anguishes of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anguishes of the followers of Christ as well” (*Gaudium et Spes, 1*).

We painfully recall that when slightly over two years ago we went to the polls and ushered in a new government we did so on the premises of what we thought were credible campaign promises of a new Malawi coming our way. Regrettably, and this seems to be the verdict of many sober Malawians, the much touted promises of change are far from being realized. The daily struggle for survival for the vast majority of Malawians only deepens. Even when such challenges as the hurricanes, Covid 19 and the war in Ukraine are factored in, our humble but honest submission is that we have missed out on leadership to seize opportunities, policy direction and intervention critically sought for at such times. The end result seems to be a Malawi worse off than what we were promised and looked forward to in a region where most of our neighbouring countries, affected by the same challenges, are registering meaningful human and economic progress.

In this Statement, in solidarity with the vast majority of Malawians who are languishing in deeper and deeper poverty, the Catholic Church, through us your Bishops, wishes, once again, to raise its voice with and on behalf of the poor:

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and the needy (Prov 31: 8 – 9).*

The cry of the poor gets louder and louder in Malawi each day. This cry is caused by, among other things, the worsening general inflation with biting food price increases, rising youth unemployment, rising school fees, inadequate medical services, the fuel crisis driving up transport costs, exploitation by unscrupulous traders and business people, foreign exchange shortages, and lack of effective consumer protection. To truly respond to the Cry of the Poor requires bold and viable public policy actions. Such public policy actions are being prevented and undermined by the vice of corruption, defective service delivery systems, inconsistent government austerity measures, bleak picture of the oncoming crop growing season, and the Tonse Alliance retrogressive way of governing.

### **1. The vice of Corruption**

We have in the past strongly spoken about the vice of corruption and how it is steadily gaining rooted in our society. The cancer of corruption has now almost become an accepted way of doing things in Malawi. It is causing havoc across several arenas of governance and service provision. In line with the Tonse Alliance campaign promises, Malawians expected the Government and relevant agencies entrusted with leading the fight against corruption to decisively and effectively combat this social ill that has become a cause for worry. The way the fight against corruption is being waged is posing more questions than answers: *Is there a serious cooperation and coordination among government institutions mandated to deal with corruption? Why is there lack of noticeable progress on many corruption cases that involve the politically and business connected? Why are there long delays in any action being taken in response to reports submitted by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) to the relevant authorities? Who is being protected? Whose interests are being served? Are the seemingly public actions against the graft done in good faith or are they meant to serve the hidden political interests of a few?*

We are of the view that honest and decisive leadership on corruption, especially regarding high profile cases and high profile persons, would send a resounding signal of serious determination to eliminate corruption in Malawi. It is also the Church's considered view that certain bureaucratic elements within the legal and institutional framework have deliberately derailed the fight against corruption. Malawians expect the Anti-Corruption Beaureau (ACB), the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP), the Attorney General, the Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA) and the Fiscal Police to work together to serve the public interests when discharging their functions and obligations. We, the Catholic Bishops in Malawi, are deeply disturbed to note that some of the long-time defenders of the poor of the poorest in our country have now become spokespersons of the powerful and the rich – leaving the weakest citizens of our country groping in the dark alone in search of economic justice. While we appreciate the complex and complicated nature of systematic and organised corruption, we call upon all those tasked with its elimination to do their duty without delay on behalf of the citizens of Malawi.

## **2. Defective Service Delivery Systems: Signs of Institutional Failure**

It continues to gravely disturb Malawians that the provision of services to the citizens which is already undermined by corruption, is marred by, among other things, a number of serious deficiencies ranging from inadequate funding, shortage of essential commodities, poor attitude of already demotivated public servants and interrupted crucial services and goods such as provision of electricity and fuel. This has affected the health, education, agriculture, water and sanitation and transport sectors, among others, to the detriment of Malawians. That the situation cannot be arrested through progressive and effective government action amounts to institutional failure and is also indicative of state failure. It is grossly unjust that when the larger citizenry is served with poor and substandard services the governing elite privately enjoy high quality services funded by the poor taxpayers. We, the Catholic Bishops once again ask: *Don't Malawians deserve better?*

## **3. Inconsistent Government's Austerity Measures**

A listening government truly in touch with people behaves in a fashion that is sensitive to the prevailing socio-economic realities. It was in this spirit that we welcomed the Government's expenditure control measures introduced mid this year as a necessary response to these realities. However, observation on what is happening on the ground lead Malawians to pose more and more disturbing questions; *Isn't the practice of the national political leadership and some key government officials plainly deviating from the so-called austerity measures? Is what we see happening a total show of hypocrisy? Isn't the leadership of the country supposed to be exemplary on the expenditure control measures? Why are the leaders contradicting themselves and engaging and undertaking what Malawians perceive as unnecessary internal and external travels, and in some cases, with large entourages? Isn't this acting in contradiction with their stated policy? Were the so-called austerity measures instituted in good faith and in pursuit of the common good?* We call upon the Government to consider such disturbing questions and the right of Malawians to receive sober and informed answers from their leaders in such matters.

## **4. Bleak Picture of the oncoming Crop Growing Season**

As in our previous statements, keep emphasizing that food security at all levels is key to the welfare of all people. In our Malawian situation food security hinges on the viability of the Affordable Inputs Programme (AIP). Over the years, the Church has observed that the implementation of AIP is riddled with a number of institutional and operational hiccups, as many rightful beneficiaries were left in the cold. Poor planning and inadequate coordination, lack of proper review of AIP implementation in the previous season, poor information sharing to AIP stakeholders, and general uncertainty on the programme are some of the observable challenges as we draw near the new farming season. The AIP programme does not inspire confidence in people for the coming growing season. The prospect of food insecurity looms large. We call on the Government to act immediately and decisively to ensure that no one goes hungry.

## **5. The Tonse Alliance retrogressive way of governing**

Malawians voted and ushered in a new Government. Malawians have regrettably observed that its way of governing is characterized by internal bickering, jostling for political clout, cronyism,

nepotism, focusing on narrow selfish political interests and disjointed stances on public policy by alliance partners. The situation is a serious cause for worry as it undermines meaningful development which would enhance the lives of people, especially the poor in Malawi. Malawians are tired of politicians who keep fighting for political power before, during, after and in between elections without regard to the development needs of the electorate. We call upon the Tonse Alliance partners as national leaders to collectively guide the people to the attainment of a better Malawi for all.

## **Recommendations and Call for Action**

Since the dawn of the New Malawi, the Catholic Church has meaningfully contributed to the development of this country through Education, Healthcare, Social Work, Civic Education, various national initiatives for peaceful nation building among others. We the Catholic Bishops believe such contributions are part and parcel of our God given Mission which also constitutes the prophetic voice required to keep our nation on the right path to true and integral development of all Malawians.

In order to build the hopes of the people of Malawi for a better life for all and to share out the God-given resources of our country in a way that responds to the needs of all its citizens, we the Catholic Bishops make the following recommendations and call for urgent action:

- a. That all duty bearers in the fight against corruption systematically collaborate to combat this destructive social ill;
- b. That the President and Government ensure that the Public Sector Review Systems Taskforce's report be made public and acted upon without further delay;
- c. That national leadership institute and enforce standard measures in basic service provision as one way of assessing public bodies under the Public Sector Reform Programme;
- d. That the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) should demonstrate by example the enforcement of government austerity measures and ensure the implementation of the public sector reforms;
- e. That there be urgent social protection measures to cushion the sufferings of the poor and effective safeguards to protect consumers from an often hostile and exploitative commodity market;
- f. That the Government institute workable corrective mechanisms to reduce the effects of the unstable macroeconomic environment;
- g. That the Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, should ensure that the 2022/23 AIP is properly and fairly implemented;
- h. That the Government immediately creatively addresses the looming problem of food security;
- i. That Tonse Alliance partners desist from worthless and needless politicking focusing attention on 2025 General elections and instead focus their attention on governing Malawi in a way motivated by fairness for all and true development of the country;
- j. That Malawians see to it that they exercise their right to participate in the affairs of their country by among other things constructively engaging and holding their government to account.

## **Prayer for our Nation**

*Dear God, you are a God of justice. You care for those who are oppressed. You love those who are marginalized. We pray for justice and redemption in our Nation. Help our Nation to know what is wrong and what is right. Provide peace and hope to those who are suffering from injustice – especially socio-economic injustice and all vices and ills that reduce and undermine the dignity that a human being ought to possess and enjoy. Show them that you are there, and you care for them and that you will make all things right. Fill our Nation with love, compassion, and socio-economic justice. Amen. (cf. Proverbs 21:15).*

**Most Reverend George Desmond Tambala,**

**Right Reverend Montfort Stima,**

**Most Reverend Thomas Luke Msusa,**

**Right Reverend Peter Musikuwa,**

**Right Reverend Martin Mtumbuka,**

**Right Reverend John Ryan,**

**Right Reverend Peter Chifukwa,**

**President of the Episcopal Conference of  
Malawi, Archdiocese of Lilongwe**

**Vice President, Episcopal Conference of  
Malawi, Diocese of Mangochi**

**Archdiocese of Blantyre**

**Diocese of Chikwawa**

**Diocese of Karonga**

**Diocese of Mzuzu**

**Diocese of Dedza**