

**SPEECH BY MR KARL CHOKOTHO PRESIDENT OF MALAWI CONFEDERATION OF CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE MZUZU REGIONAL TRADE FAIR, MZUZU TAIFA MARKET CAR PARK, 29<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2017**

**Your Worship, Mayor of the City of Mzuzu, Councillor William Mkandawire, and all Councillors Present Here**

**Dr. Macleod Kadam'manja, Chief Executive Officer, Mzuzu City Council;**

**Trustees and Councillors of the Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry;**

**Government Officers present;**

**Distinguished Exhibitors and Captains of Industry;**

**Members of the Press;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Permit me, Your Worship, to welcome you to this auspicious occasion today marking the official opening of the Mzuzu Trade Fair which has been organized by the Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to you for accepting to officially grace this occasion.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI) is stepping up its efforts in organising trade promotion

activities in the major cities in Malawi to give an opportunity to businesses to showcase their products in form of goods, services, skills or any form of trade or commerce. We do this to champion business development and promote trade as a Voice of the Private Sector.

### **Guest of Honour**

You will recall that last year the exhibition was held at the Mzuzu Upper Stadium and today we are holding it here at the Taifa Market Carpark. We realise the importance of such events and intend to build a culture of the Trade Fairs here by consistently and regularly holding such events. We have plans as MCCCCI to establish a Trade Fair Ground in the City of Mzuzu where businesses can be showcasing their products just as it is done in Blantyre but so far we lack a proper place where we can be holding Trade Fairs here in Mzuzu.

It is our request therefore, Guest of Honour, that you should facilitate the allocation of land where the Mzuzu Show Ground can be developed. A purposefully developed exhibition ground with proper amenities would serve both the exhibitors and patrons better than the open grounds we are currently using for the exhibitions.

### **Guest of Honour, Ladies and Gentlemen**

The objectives of the Trade Fair have not changed but it is the approach that changes in response to emerging developments. The Mzuzu Trade fair will provide a platform for local participants from the north and those from other regions to showcase their exhibitions and network with patrons and other participants.

Many businesses that have participated in the fairs have benefited a lot from them through meeting new customers and consolidating relationships with existing customers; Others have easily conducted market research of their new products and services while some have gained new competitive insights; built a good and positive corporate image, and many more other benefits. Trade Fairs also promote a culture of entrepreneurship where potential entrepreneurs can obtain ideas for businesses either as distributors or suppliers of raw materials or services.

### **Guest of Honour, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Each trade fair is unique. This year's Mzuzu Trade Fair is held under the theme; **'Promoting SMEs for An Inclusive and Robust Economy'**. The theme is a reflection of the long economic and business journey that the country is pursuing to turn around the direction of wealth creation to all Malawians through promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises and with full awareness that Mzuzu is largely characterised by Small and Medium businesses. Mzuzu City has proportionally a much larger number of SMEs compared to Lilongwe and Blantyre and hence the focus on SMEs.

In Malawi, SMEs constitute the largest number of businesses which means that any intervention to boost their activities can easily transform our country because they impact many people. This therefore suggests that consideration of SMEs should form greater part of the development agenda for the realisation of a robust and inclusive economy that we aspire for in this country.

Since growth of SMEs require appropriate business linkages with relatively larger businesses, this fair has been organized in such a

manner that it attracts all sizes of businesses from across the country to allow desirable networking in order to foster business learning and linkages.

**Guest of Honour,**

SMEs face a number of challenges such as access to affordable capital, skills sets, access to markets, and lack of supportive business services, among others. That is why Government of Malawi through Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism has been working on a new SME Policy which we are informed is being finalized.

Let me also highlight specific challenges that affect doing businesses in Mzuzu City which require the attention of your office, Guest of Honour. Businesses in Mzuzu are being affected by high city rates due to the change of the formulae which was adopted by the City Council. This issue has been tabled by business community at the Mzuzu City Council more than once requesting the City to change the new formula for calculating city rates. The formula which is being applied increases the cost of doing business and renders businesses operating from the City uncompetitive as the rates are built in the cost of production or service delivery. On the other hand, the city becomes unattractive to investment.

Secondly, businesses note that attempts have been made by the City Council to rehabilitate the city service roads. However, businesses are concerned with the poor quality of construction in some areas to the extent that roads that have been maintained do not last long. We also request that the road upgrading and maintenance should be also carried out in Industrial sites such as Luwanga. While the Luwanga- Nkhorongo road has been upgraded to bitumen standard the entire industrial area is still accessed through dusty roads.

Businesses have also been worried with waste management system which is very poor and there has been no improvement to the problem besides commissioning of the state of the art waste management facility at Msilo. Uncollected garbage is visible around the main market and many other areas within the City Centre where business is conducted.

Public Private Partnership arrangement avails an opportunity to the City of Mzuzu where you can work with private sector to address some of these challenges. For example, we are aware that some private players are collecting refuse in the City of Lilongwe at a fee.

### **Guest of Honour, Distinguished Exhibitors, Ladies and Gentlemen**

I believe there is a lot that we can do as businesses to enhance ourselves by coming together as an organised group through MCCCCI. In unity there is power and the bigger the group, the louder the Voice. I would like to encourage businesses in Mzuzu to become members of MCCCCI and be part of sharing ideas of how best to promote the city, the people of Mzuzu and the Northern Region as a whole with the support of the City Council and other relevant public service institutions. We need to explore business opportunities in Mzuzu and surrounding areas and be the first to take advantage of the opportunities. I would like to urge the City Council to share with the business community the plan for Mzuzu City so that businesses can begin to strategize and align themselves to opportunities which would come with the plan. In other countries, City Councils profile business opportunities which are sold to businesses and in turn provide services to support such businesses.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

I have noted today the number of exhibitors for the Mzuzu Trade Fair is convincingly growing compared to last year. The growth in number of

participants is commendable and I hope it will continue to grow and make the Trade Fair part of the flagship events for the City of Mzuzu. I am pleased to notice from the exhibitors that some have come all the way from the Southern and Central regions to promote their products. I am hopeful that your efforts will bear fruits.

**Guest of Honour,**

As a tradition of Trade Fairs we award trophies to best exhibitors at each Trade Fair. A panel of assessors conducted the assessment of the exhibitions and identified the Best exhibitor and the Second best Exhibitor.

Let me now invite you Guest of Honour to present the trophies to the awardees:

**Best Exhibitor: Malawi Bureau of Standards (MBS)**

**Second Best Exhibitor: Medical Aid Society of Malawi (MASM)**

**Ladies and Gentlemen and distinguished exhibitors,**

Allow me to thank you all for coming to support our businesses by patronizing the fair. I very much appeal to the public to make use of the three days of the fair.

I would also encourage the exhibitors themselves to share information among themselves in order to work together by developing relevant value chains and partnerships.

At this juncture allow me to invite the Guest of Honour, Your Worship, Mayor of the City of Mzuzu to address us and officially open the fair.

**May God Bless You for Listening**