



**NATIONAL ADDRESS BY
THE STATE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI,
HIS EXCELLENCY DR. LAZARUS MCCARTHY CHAKWERA.**

4TH JULY, 2020

Right Honorable Dr. Saulos Klaus Chilima, State Vice President of the Republic of Malawi;

Dr. Phuka, Co-chair of the Presidential Taskforce on Covid-19;

Dr. Ngoma, Dr. Malewezi, and Dr. Chinula, Executive Members of the Society of Medical Doctors;

Members of the Press;

Fellow Citizens;

Today marks 7 days since Dr. Chilima and I took our oaths of office. During that time, we have been assessing several critical areas that require immediate and strategic government intervention. At the top of the list is the Covid-19 pandemic. Following consultations with the Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 that was formed by my predecessor, I come before you to give you a sobering report. This report can be summed up in five words:

Malawi, we have a situation!

On the 3rd of March, there were 0 confirmed cases of Covid-19 within our borders. In fact, even when the previous Administration declared a state of disaster on March 20th, ordering the closure of schools and restricting public gatherings, Malawi was still Covid-free. But that all changed within two weeks. By the 3rd of April, there were 3 cases. By the 3rd of May, that number had multiplied thirteen times to 39, claiming the lives of three Malawians. By the 3rd of June, the number of confirmed cases had multiplied ten-fold to over 360. And as of yesterday, the 3rd of July, the number was over 1,400. This means that in the three months since our country registered its first Covid-19 case, the number of confirmed infections has grown by well over 46 thousand percent.

I know that this sounds alarming, but I want you to understand that this situation is much worse today than it was three months ago. To put that into perspective, let me share four facts that are easy to understand. First, it is a fact that even though over 1,400 people have tested positive for Covid-19 in the last three months, almost half of them have gotten it in the last three weeks. Secondly, it is a fact that even though most infections in the first three months were spread by persons who caught the virus abroad, most of the infections in the last three weeks have been spread by persons who caught the virus in the local community where they work or live. Thirdly, it is a fact that even though 16 people have died from Covid-19 in the last three months, 75% of them have died in the last three weeks. Fourthly, it is a fact that even though the number of people found with Covid-19 is just over 1,400, those with the virus may be twenty times that

number, spreading it unknowingly because they have not been tested and do not show symptoms.

This quartet of facts is telling us one simple message: The coronavirus is spreading; it is spreading all over Malawi; it is spreading near each of us; it is spreading faster than before; and it is spreading with the power to kill. This truth may be unpleasant, but it is also undeniable, and my Administration is committed to telling you the truth. Telling the truth about this virus is not only the right thing to do, but also a matter of life and death. The age of lies and misinformation is over. For that reason, I wish to dispel some common misconceptions about Covid-19 before I discuss the additional measures my Administration is putting in place at the recommendation of The Presidential Task Force on Covid-19:

1. If you think you cannot be infected with Covid-19 because you are young, you are mistaken. Those infected range from infants aged below 1 to senior citizens aged over 70.
2. If you think you or others around you are not infected because they have no symptoms and are not sick, you are mistaken. Out of every 100 infected people, only 20 will show symptoms or get sick, while the rest carry and spread the virus with mild or no symptoms.
3. If you think that washing your hands before you enter a building is enough to keep you from getting infected, you are mistaken. Keeping your hands clean before you enter a building is important, but equally important is keeping your hands clean throughout the day while you are inside the building.

4. If you think that wearing a mask is enough to keep you from getting infected, you are mistaken. A mask can only protect you and others if it is used correctly. For example, a mask should be put on with clean hands, and it should cover both your mouth and nose. Also, when you want to take off your mask temporarily to speak, you should take it off completely, not slide it under your chin which is not sanitized.
5. If you think that greeting others by touching elbows instead of shaking hands means that the person you are greeting will not infect you, you are mistaken. Not only does the elbow greeting breach social distancing recommendations, it also puts you at risk of the virus from those who cough into their elbows.

In view of these misconceptions, the best thing to do whether in public or in private is to always take preventive actions towards yourself as if everyone around you is infected and to always take preventive actions towards others as if you are already infected. This is the only way you can be sure that you and those around you are safe. I know that this is a difficult discipline to maintain, but even if one person where you live or work relaxes and stops following this guideline, they put everyone at risk.

This is the same guideline I have directed the organizing committee of the Inauguration Ceremony on Independence Day to follow. That means that although the stadium sits 40,000 people, only half that number will be allowed in so that there is appropriate social distancing both outside and inside the stadium. Those traveling from outside the capital city

using public transport are urged to at least wear a cloth mask throughout their travels. No one will be allowed to enter the stadium without sanitizing their hands, having their temperature taken, or wearing their mask. For those who come without a mask, a mask will be provided, as my Administration has secured and reserved 100,000 masks for this event.

I know that there are those who believe that the best way to prevent infections on this day is to cancel the event. The merits of this approach are not lost on me, but I believe that what is best for us as a society is to find new ways of functioning in the face of Covid-19, not paralyzing our functions altogether. Covid-19 does not demand the end of our way of life, but the adoption of a new way of life. That new way of life must strike a balance between public safety and social sustenance.

I have directed the Presidential Taskforce on Covid-19 to work with the Inter-ministerial Inauguration Organizing Committee in ensuring that these measures are implemented as a matter of priority. As you can imagine, the work of the taskforce requires direction and discipline, as well as seamless coordination with both public and private stakeholders. The stakeholders include the nine Covid-related clusters being overseen by the Department of Disaster Management (DODMA), one of which is the health cluster which itself has nine subcommittees. To provide direction to these efforts and review the efficiency thereof, I will soon be announcing a new Minister of Health in my Administration and a new Principal Secretary for the Ministry to start their work on Tuesday.

Together, their task will be to instill accountability and provide direction to the efforts of the taskforce; to publicly account for how Covid-19 resources are being used and how Covid-19 measures are being followed; to provide our brave men and women in the health sector with the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), medical supplies, and risk benefits indispensable to their work; to coordinate partnerships with community leaders and institutional bodies in holding a strong line of defense against the spread of the virus; and to ensure that the gains we have made in the fight against other infections like HIV and Tuberculosis are not lost as a result of the pressures our fragile health facilities are under from the recent sharp increase in Covid-19 cases.

Make no mistake about it: we will win this fight against Covid-19, no matter what it takes or how long it takes. In the last twelve months, we as a nation have overcome great and daunting odds that were stacked against us. We did this by working together as one and the only way to defeat this virus is to work together. Muliriwu ndi wa Tonse, ndiye tonse tichite mbali yathu kuti tiugonjetse.

God bless you and God bless Malawi.