

WELCOME REMARKS AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH CEREMONY OF NICE AS A PUBLIC TRUST, 25 JANUARY, 2014, CIVO STADIUM, LILONGWE

BY

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FOR THE NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR CIVIC EDUCATION (NICE)

- The Guest of Honour, Her Lordship The Chief Justice, Anastasia Msosa SC
- Minister of Information and Civic Education, Hon. Brown Mpinganjira and all Cabinet Ministers here present,
- The Chairperson and Board Members of NICE
- The Head of EU Delegation to Malawi, His Excellency Ambassador Alexander Baum
- Management, Staff and volunteers of NICE
- The Malawi Electoral Commission Chairperson, Justice Maxon Mbendera SC and other Commissioners
- Principal Secretaries:
 - Ministry of Information and Civic Education
 - Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs
- Head of Unit, National Authorising Office, Ms Madalo Nyambose
- Members of Parliament
- The Chairperson and members of staff - Malawi Human Rights Commission
- Heads of Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organisations and Faith Based Organisations
- Paramount Chiefs, Senior Chiefs and Traditional leaders present
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- The Chairperson of the organizing committee and your members
- Distinguished Invited guests from Government and Private Sectors

I am privileged and honored to welcome you all to this historic and auspicious occasion of the official launch of NICE as a Public Trust. In particular, let me thank our Guest of Honor, Her Lordship the Chief Justice, Mrs. Anastanzia Msosa, for taking the time to celebrate and launch this great institution.

NICE is today celebrating its graduation from a project that only worked for a fixed time to a Public Trust that will be there forever. Today, we want to proclaim our commitment to the Malawian public and pledge our undying fidelity to serving the interests of Malawians and not any individual or grouping. Today, NICE wants to publicly proclaim its respect for the many people in the communities across Malawi who serve in its structures selflessly and without

reward. Today we want to publicly recognize the people who have served NICE from its inception to date, those living and departed, and their contribution to making democracy work in Malawi. Today, we want to celebrate our being Malawians from different backgrounds – be it political, religious, cultural – yet comfortably sharing the same space without conflict. Today, we want to have a prelude of how a democratic society can and should freely express itself without fear and have a taste of the potential that will come with the 20 May tripartite elections. Today, NICE wants to affirm its commitment to **“Walking *with Communities on the democracy road*”** as an independent institution in line with the laws of Malawi.

Guest of Honor

in line with 2014 as the first time ever for Malawi to have tripartite elections, this launch is celebrated under the theme, **“Walking with a transformed and empowered society towards free, fair and credible elections.”** Hence, today’s launch event will be interspaced with a number of performances and activities with voter education messages that are aimed at mobilizing, motivating and sensitizing those registered voters to turn out in large numbers on May 20 and cast their vote in an informed manner. For a wider outreach, this event is being aired live by Zodiak, Matindi and MBC radio stations.

Guest of Honor

The launch events are also in line with NICE’s mandate which is to “contribute towards democracy and good governance through civic and voter education.” In implementation of its mandate, I am pleased to inform the Guest of Honor that NICE has made tremendous achievements since it was established in 1999 as a Government of Malawi project with bi-lateral support from the European Union and in its current status as a Public Trust.

Over the years, NICE has established itself as a primary provider of impartial civic and voter education in Malawi, with a massive geographical outreach through more than 8,000 volunteers at village and district levels. Its well-developed structure has been used by state and non-state actors alike as a platform to reach out to the rural and urban populace for various democratization initiatives. NICE has also played an important role in voter education in Malawi’s four successive democratic elections in 1999, 2000, 2004 and 2009.

Guest of Honor

In line with this, as Malawi is preparing for the tripartite elections, NICE has taken a central role in providing civic and voter education. So far, it has provided voter education for the registration process. In this regard, NICE has significantly contributed towards voter registration mobilization campaign that resulted in more than 94 % registrants turning out against MEC’s projected figures. Despite

this success, a lot remains to be done, in order to mobilise those registered to turn out on May 20 to cast their vote. We therefore, strongly appeal to those registered, to turn out in their large numbers and cast their vote on 20th May. On its part, NICE will strive to continue providing high quality civic and voter education in a professional and non-partisan manner in all districts in Malawi and reaching out to all sectors of Malawian communities.

Guest of Honor

While preparing for this launch, many people have asked me and my colleagues why the need to have this launch at this time. We at NICE have considered this and are happy to indicate some of our reasons.

Firstly, today we are launching NICE as an independent body and declaring that this institution is for Malawians and not any political party or individual. We want to affirm that NICE is and shall always be serving the interests of Malawians and should be constantly checked whether it stands up to it. In this work, NICE wants to be clear: we will strive to make the voiceless have a voice but we will not serve as a mouth piece for anyone. The NICE being launched today is not a voice of the voiceless, but a friend of the voiceless to speak out for themselves.

Secondly, this public launch should also be seen as our commitment to the nation that we come with a transformational message. Today, we want to add our voice to others that have identified one major challenge in our country as 'business as usual' in nearly all spheres of life. For us, we want to publicly announce that in the democratic governance arena, business will no longer be as usual, but focused to empowering citizenry to hold accountable transactional leadership and put in place transformational duty bearers at all levels – in our schools, in the villages, in our prayer places, in the development committees, in political parties, in our statutory bodies, in our parliament and everywhere. We pledge to lead by example in this regard.

Thirdly, this launch is our statement to Malawians that it is possible for Malawi to be transformed with patriotic citizens that take seriously their rights and duties. This nation has a young democracy which needs to be nurtured by patriotic citizens that think not only of themselves and what they can benefit from situations around them, but also men and women who sacrifice their time, energies, skills and resources for the common good and the good of others. NICE Board, staff and volunteers have done it before and keep doing it now and this is something that can be emulated and that is why we are celebrating it today.

Guest of Honour,

In addition to the many reasons we can give why NICE is now a Trust, I wish to put it on record that NICE is there to add value in the democratic governance

processes of this country. Among other things, this new NICE, this Public Trust, wants to contribute in addressing the heavily documented challenges facing our country including, among others, the following:

- A prevailing culture of silence and despondency emanating from aspects of traditional and cultural values that promote non-confrontation and group needs and compromise on individual freedoms and standing up against the wrong. This has been compounded by continuing un-democratic values that have permeated the actions of duty bearers and service providers across the board and made citizens to resign to their fate.
- Patronage or 'Big Man Syndrome' has permeated in all the strata of Malawian communities from national to local levels hence rendering citizens as mere hand clappers, subjects and recipients of development and services through faction leaders who are there to perpetuate narrow, partisan, self-aggrandizing interests of their masters and perpetuating the status quo.
- Limited access to information and critical policy documents by citizens due to a culture of secrecy by duty bearers; low literacy levels, limited availability of resource centres and other dissemination units that provide information in a non-partisan manner and on a permanent or continuous basis.
- Inability of members of parliament to effectively play their representative, legislative and oversight roles due to narrow partisan interests and lack of capacity resulting in frustrating the citizenry to actively participate in national and community development agenda.
- Dwindling spirit of volunteerism among the citizenry due to misunderstanding of democracy, erosion of the spirit of self-reliance, self-help and common good orientation and a growing culture of hand-outs promoted by the majority of duty bearers and representatives of the people at all levels.
- Weak CSOs due to founder syndrome, lack of entrenched transparency and accountability systems, unhealthy competition among themselves leading to duplication of efforts and inefficiencies, unclear focus resulting in CSO agenda being set by donors and lack of clarity on their primary constituency.
- A culture of impunity, especially in relation to those in public offices, even amidst gross abuse of public office and national resources resulting in the frustration of some sections of the populace to be interested in participating in public life. This has resulted in low quality initiatives that are not criticised as the able minded have tended to concentrate on their personal affairs at the expense of community and national interests. This has further entrenched a culture of being too powerful to have to account among public servants.
- Pre and post-election violence and conflicts which enormously destroy societies' social fabric and common values which hold people together for a unified goal and purpose. There is a high level of political, religious and inter-cultural intolerance among Malawians which could lead to violence which is mostly influenced by differences in political party affiliations.

Guest of Honor,

It is against this background that the Trust being launched today has set for itself the following four cornerstones areas as its core focus: Capacity building of Malawians and civil society organisations; Deepening voices of accountability, transparency and responsiveness of duty-bearers and service providers; Strengthening the NICE structure, networking and co-ordination; and Promoting peaceful co-existence and social cohesion among Malawians.

Guest of Honor,

Allow me to mention that NICE has reached this far because it has stood on the shoulders of giants. As such, we intend also to work with other giants in the governance sector in order to contribute to the consolidation of democratic governance in Malawi. At this point, allow me to acknowledge the following for their sacrifices and contributions to the making of NICE that we are launching today:

- Professor Wiseman Chirwa, present here today, who was part of the team that initially conceptualized the idea of NICE and drafted the first working documents relating to NICE under the auspices of GTZ;
- The Public Affairs Committee (PAC) which served as the surrogate mother to the birth, growth and maturation of NICE;
- The Malawian Managers who steered NICE during the various times of its growth, namely, Mr. Orison Chaponda, the first Malawian Manager; Mr. Jeff Kabondo who steered the institutionalization process of NICE from a project to a Trust; and Mr. Steven Nkoka who managed the first lap of NICE as a Public Trust;
- The Heads of Unit of the National Authorising Office and their staff at the Ministry of Finance, including those that have helped NICE to gain the hard to come by experience in managing donor funds;
- The European Union Delegation to Malawi for its untiring financial and technical support rendered to NICE from its inception to date and for protecting the independence of the Trust at its beginning when it was being undermined. You have been a partner that walked the tough road with NICE and we celebrate with you today.
- The 8,000 plus volunteers in all the 31 districts of Malawi (Area Civic Education Coordinators, Zone Coordinators, Para-Civic Educators, District Advisory Forum members), traditional leaders that have welcomed NICE and its volunteers in the communities and all faith based organisations that have opened their doors to NICE and its work. We thank you all.

Guest of Honor

For the future, NICE is committed towards being a genuine people's organization that is effective, independent, non-partisan, efficient and accountable to all Malawians regardless of their status in community, region, gender, political and religious affiliation. It will therefore build on past activities by embarking on civic education that seeks to impart skills, knowledge, and participatory virtues in order for the people to effectively participate in public life as actors and not spectators in affairs that affect them.

Guest of Honor

In the past, civic education centered mainly on giving people information on democracy and human rights but did not do much on people's empowerment, and as already alluded to in my speech, this has not only made the leaders to take people for granted but has also made them demigods who deem themselves to be above the law and have proceeded to recklessly plunder and lay waste of state resources with impunity. Indeed these people have miserably failed to account to the very same people that have put them to power at all levels of society since multi-party democracy was attained and have tended to cast a disdainful eye on those censuring their behavior. These behaviours have left the public in a state of disillusionment and have tended to resign to fate by being docile and accepting the norm in what others have termed "business as usual."

It is however the intention of the New NICE to end all that through the implementation of a civic education programme that is aimed at empowering people to take action in striving for their better conditions. The civic education that the new NICE will provide will endeavor to arm citizens with knowledge and skills that will conscientise and empower them to think analytically, critically and take duty bearers to task on pertinent issues that concern them. This civic education will focus on critical issues affecting our people and undermining the entrenchment of democratic governance. It will start with awareness for action and dialogue between duty bearers, service providers as well as rights holders so that transparency and accountability can prevail in our society. The fuel for this type of civic education is the grassroots who are in the majority yet enjoy their rights the least.

Guest of Honor

In short, it will be the type of civic education that will built patriotism and national pride in ourselves as people and as Malawians. It will be the type of civic education that will free us from oppression and fear of authority, and not civic indoctrination.

Guest of Honor

The new NICE sees itself as an agent of transformation: of individuals, communities, institutions, systems and the nation. NICE wants to spearhead innovative and creative thinking in the democratic governance arena where long held practices should be questioned and dynamic ways of enlisting citizen participation are identified **by the people and for themselves.**

NICE plans to contribute towards ensuring that Malawi has living democracy – democracy that ensures that the common person, and not just elites, enjoy not only their civil and political rights, but also their social, economic and cultural rights. This realization, NICE believes, can happen in this generation and needs to start today.

Guest of Honour

As we leave this place, today, I urge all Malawians to believe in themselves and the power that is in them to make our young democracy work. This power is in our vote and I look forward to all Malawians who have registered once again to go and vote on the 20th of May and express their choice through the ballot. Yes, we can make democracy work; yes, your vote is your right; yes, your choice is your destiny. Yes, time has come for you to decide for your future and please make use of it my fellow Malawians on May 20. And yes, NICE will walk with Malawians beyond the coming elections!

As for our invited Guest, please enjoy this day in celebrating with us at this launch.

Thank you very much for your attention.