

Final



REMARKS BY MSGR. DR. PATRICK THAWALE, CHAIRPERSON OF PAC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, DURING INTERFACE MEETING WITH THE STATE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI, HIS EXCELLENCY, REV. DR. LAZARUS MCCARTHY CHAKWERA ON 28th NOVEMBER, 2023 AT 2:00 PM AT KAMUZU PALACE, LILONGWE.

Your Excellency, Dr. Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, the President of the Republic of Malawi,

We are glad to have an audience with you once again since July 2022. As you may recall, we booked this audience in the month of June this year but because of your tight schedules we meet today to share our views as we should have done then. A lot has happened since then.

Your Excellency, as we draw towards the end of the year PAC wishes to share observations on the state of affairs of our country. We share the observations in an honest and frank manner as agreed between us in June, 2021. In doing so, Your Excellency should understand us in light of the role we have played during the reign of each regime. In no way, Your Excellency should view us as hating anyone in your administration in cases where positions are cited. We continue to draw inspiration from your wisdom that humility and integrity are virtues you seek to see in the pursuit of your leadership.

Your Excellency, we recognise and acknowledge some of the difficult decisions you have made or have not made when expected to. In either case we do not have doubt that you mean well and would like to see this country move forward. We have seen road infrastructure being constructed – demonstrating your commitment to the completion of the unfinished roads. Your political posture and eloquence qualify you for leadership in the highest office. Your level of tolerance is magnificent since you took office.

Your Excellency, allow us to take you back to 2020 when you assumed the office of the President of Malawi. Your leadership and Tonse Alliance created a unique ray of hope of transformational leadership as we

departed from the previous regime. Frustrations among Malawians were consigned to the past hoping that the time had come to reverse transactional leadership. Transformative leadership was seen as the only option for the Tonse Administration based on the pledges made. That Your Excellency had risen from our fraternity to the highest office, our conviction and trust in your leadership was unshakable. You became a source of pride. Different narratives emerged at the time. Some argued that a clergy cannot run the country as politics is not his domain. Some of us took the contrary view. We felt that most issues of political governance could be closer to your heart, and that your decision making would be swift , supported by a revamped public service populated by qualified technocrats.

Your Excellency, we deliberately raise the issues on how you were viewed prior and just after taking office for you to appreciate the critical juncture of your leadership style. Indeed, Your Excellency you inspired Malawians with your inaugural speech. You motivated everybody. Currently, that positive narrative is quickly shifting from bad to worse largely because of your inconsistencies and delays in execution of actions and decisions in the administration and management of the economy, the public sector, the rule of law and governance in general. Your Excellency's administrative policy mix as articulated in the MCP Manifesto has been unsatisfactory and at times retrogressive, uncertain and risky.

In light of the above, we make observations on the following aspects:

1. Economy

Many economic commentators have made observations on the current economic situation. Your Excellency, this remains an elephant in the room in Malawi. We will not go round and round but make observations on the recent devaluation of 44%. Let us be clear at the outset that PAC is not against any devaluation. Previous governments in Malawi have devalued the Malawi Kwacha. So for us we do not condemn devaluation as such. We are aware that the popular view is that by devaluing Malawi's currency, this country makes its money cheaper and boosts exports, rendering them more competitive in the global market. Conversely, foreign products become more expensive, so the demand for imports falls. As such, Your Excellency, Governments use devaluation to combat a trade imbalance and have exports exceed imports. We congratulate Your Excellency for making such a bold decision following negotiations with International Monetary Fund (IMF).

However, Your Excellency, our major concern is the negative impact on the livelihood of Malawians caused by the 44%. Already when the government devalued currency by 25% last year, the impact on rural Malawians was big. Now with 44% more suffering is expected among

majority of Malawians. We believe tough decisions should have been made earlier, in fact when you assumed office. On the contrary, Your Excellency, domestic borrowing, international travels by state officials including yourself, and failure in general to tighten fiscal policies became order of the day. Coupled with the current huge wage bill no doubt Malawi could not be spared from devaluation. As such the latter factors chased the few dollars Malawi had. It seems to us that your leadership might have forgotten MCP manifesto and the pledges made. Your Excellency's actions since you assumed office run counter to the very content and spirit of the MCP Manifesto. One of the pillars for an MCP-led capable democratic development state is "getting the policy mix right as a strategy to get the country moving again in a positive direction. This essentially entails getting the right policies in place, getting the sequencing right, and the flexibility to change quickly when a strategy is not working"(MCP Manifesto, 2019:12). We observe that in many areas your decision making has failed to get the sequencing of your policies right and to get the policy mix right as a strategy. In support of our observation, we further note a fundamental departure from your overarching goal to achieve certainty and reduce risks in economic decision making. MCP Manifesto (p.12) states that "The primary goal of the MCP-led government will be to implement these policies in a way that will reduce uncertainty and risk in economic decision making". We welcome the austerity measures put in place following the recent devaluation but may not be adequate to turn around the economic crisis Malawi faces, especially that the appetite for borrowing to consume has characterised your economic strategy.

Your Excellency, it is time your government worked on a strategy to stop importation of non-essential commodities following the current economic turmoil we face. We believe these and other aspects below would contribute to turning around of our economy.

2. Cabinet and Public Service Appointments

Your Excellency may recall that in the previous dialogue between yourself and PAC several aspects on Cabinet and public service appointments were discussed. Your Excellency, MCP Manifesto on Governance and Administration is impressive. It states that: "An MCP government will bring to an end the current situation whereby a career of work for the state turns into the reserved privilege of the few while maladministration and ineffectiveness are encouraged" (p.16). The spirit of this statement addresses several areas of decision making in the administration inherited in 2020. These include: appointments, recruitment, postings and nepotism in the civil service, to mention a few.

2.1 Civil Service

We begin by pointing issues surrounding the leadership at the Office of the President and Cabinet. We do so not because we hate any individual or institution. Your Excellency will appreciate that CSOs have a space to play checks and balances during your reign. In this regard, we note that despite the euphoria on the appointment made last year on the position of Secretary to the President and Cabinet the civil service is no better state than it was before the appointment. Your Excellency, for example there are complaints that some civil service appointments, recruitments and posting are unprocedural and partisan in nature rendering to conclusions that they favour specific districts or based on party affiliations. From reliable sources, it looks like some appointments made by the Secretary to the President and Cabinet do not fall within her powers, and in many cases with questionable skills. There has also been appointment of Principal Secretaries from outside civil service who may not have skills on such positions. Officers who were looking forward to be meritoriously promoted have been left frustrated. Coupled with postings of competent officers to other Ministries in a bid to create room for MCP sympathizers, several Principal Secretaries, Directors, Deputy Directors and even officers of lower ranks are disgruntled to the extent that your government cannot achieve the desired service delivery. These irregular recruitments have in a number of cases been made outside the approved establishment and approved budget. These have led to a ballooned layers of Principle Secretaries and Directors and even junior staff resulting in a wage bill that is now hovering over 1 Trillion Malawi Kwacha, an over-expenditure that has necessitated unwarranted domestic borrowing in an already squeezed fiscal space. The perception out there is that this irregular recruitment cannot be done without Your Excellency's approval.

2.2 Cabinet Size and OPC

Your Excellency, we greatly appreciate that during your reshuffle of the Cabinet last year you slightly reduced the size. Your action was applauded from different quarters of our society. On our part, that reduction might not be adequate as the current cabinet size has a huge bearing on the country's budget. Given the current economic situation as rightly pointed out in the address to the Nation on 15th November 2023 in which new austerity measures were announced, Your Excellency may need to move further and fast to dissolve the Cabinet and appoint 15 Ministers only with gravitas and convening power. We are aware that appointment of Cabinet Ministers is Your Excellency's prerogative but our recommendation would reset the button of your leadership for service delivery - for all the Ministers would take a new oath of office and allegiance to Your Excellency.

In a bid to refresh the lean cabinet, the leadership at the helm of OPC would be replaced following allegations of poor recruitments, appointments and postings but not forgetting how interdiction of ACB Director General damaged her reputation. We are aware that the leadership is well qualified but may not suit the current position. Her integrity and credibility remain an issue. Her replacement would be in line with MCP Manifesto (p.15) which states in this regard that: "A capable democratic developmental state cannot deliver if it is not served by a governance and public administration framework that is efficient, responsive, transparent and accountable and run by people who are selfless, objective, open and honest. These people should also demonstrate high levels of integrity and leadership". We refuse to condone leadership that frustrates the entire civil service. We must at all times act for greater good.

2.3 Presidential Advisors

Your Excellency, as alluded to, in applying "the flexibility to change quickly when a strategy is not working" (MCP Manifesto, 2019:12), we are of the view that the strategy to maintain all Presidential Advisors on the job cannot work now and runs counter to the austerity measures set soon after 44% devaluation. We advocate that you keep very few of them in critical areas to save the money. The State machinery has so many experts that any Head of State can call upon for specific pieces of advice. Even outside government, Your Excellency may cheaply outsource than maintaining the entire group of Presidential Advisors. We know they are good people but the economic situation demands us to act swiftly.

2.4 Faith Affiliated Appointments

Your Excellency, our representation is from the faith community and we stand for the voiceless. There is public observation that your appointments favour members of your church and perhaps by coincidence employ more those that are Pentecostals. We would like to be clear at this juncture. We are not stating that members of your church should not be appointed, but there could be a pattern people analyse in the process of government appointments which does not resonate well with public expectation. If this is indeed true, Your Excellency may reconsider the manner in which you appoint officials in state institutions. It does not augur well with the spirit of your Manifesto to fight against discrimination in various aspects as alluded earlier.

We wish to caution Your Excellency that equally, main stream churches should not always expect that their followers will at all times dominate in government appointed jobs. We advocate religious inclusivity but not at the expense of merit so that service delivery improves in the state machinery.

2.5 MCP Loyalists

Through Your Excellency, let the word go to the MCP loyalists that not everybody in the party can be offered a job in government. You are the State President who is looked upon as a Father of the Nation. You are expected to appoint people based on merit rather than party affiliation. Political party loyalists should avoid ownership of the President. Your Excellency will only triumph in 2025 if you become more inclusive. We appeal objectivity in the execution of appointments.

3. Corruption and the Rule of Law

MCP Manifesto (p.18) states that MCP government will “ensure that prosecution of corruption cases is impartial targeting all culprits regardless of their standing in society and political allegiance..... The MCP Government will ensure the law will be applied firmly and without discrimination”. In reading MCP Manifesto, one would have hoped that the drive to fight against corruption could maintain the same momentum as it was in the initial stages. Your Excellency’s administration started well by not protecting anybody from arrests in the high offices. This was commendable. However, our trust on the drive was eroded in the manner in which the ACB Director General was arrested and interdicted. This created a huge dent under Tonse Administration. The interdiction of the ACB Director General dented Your Excellency’s image in that the public felt you approved the decision.

We further observe selective justice and noted that some old cases are not being pursued giving an impression new cases became more important than previous ones. The fight against corruption should not be based on selective justice. In this regard, Your Excellency will be expected to reset the button. We know that the ACB remains committed in the fight against corruption and must be fully supported by your political machinery based on MCP Manifesto to “Improve the capacity of the ACB in its various departments such as investigation, prosecution, civic education and outreach”.

4. Tonse Alliance Administration

The challenges Malawi faces now require the entire Tonse Administration to meet and deliberate in further mitigating economic and governance challenges. Your Excellency, it seems the spirit of Tonse Alliance continue to evaporate apart from the cordial relationship with the Vice-President. Is it not high time that in such a situation Tonse Joint Press Conferences on the economy could be staged? Some pledges that were popular were not just MCP, they were pledged from other parties in the Alliance – they also attracted voters to vote for Your Excellency. We watched your rallies on

TVs and heard your tantalizing pledges. Your Excellency may have a duty to call a meeting of Alliance partners to strategize on how to mitigate your loss of popularity. Even if you go separate in the race of 2025 how will you condemn policies that all of you have been part of.

5. Affordable Input Programme (AIP)

AIP has always been a debatable policy in Malawi. Several arguments have been advanced for and against but the bottom line has been the fact that it consumes a huge portion of the national budget. PAC would like to join those who advocate for an end of the AIP. We believe the resources saved from this move would be redirected to other productive sectors including Mega Farms and medium productive farmers. We share the view, however, that the poor must be supported to ensure that there is food security. But with the current economic situation bold decisions must be made to exist from the programme noting that the programme has been dented with corrupt practices.

7. Conclusion

Your Excellency, indeed devaluation is a symptom of your actions, omissions and decisions pursued in the administration of state affairs. Domestic borrowing for consumption, international trips, cabinet size and the entire size of civil service (including the unwarranted numbers in the embassies) as a result of recruitments have been the driving factors to the current economic affairs of the country. Your Excellency may have been insensitive to the complaints and pieces of advice from stakeholders leading to perception that the Tonse Administration seem to be clueless. Your Excellency have no choice but to act decisively on some recommendations made in order to jump start the economy. Malawians are crying out there. The poor are starving. The country is lacking message of hope on the current economic terrain. We cannot maintain the status quo or else we create room for civil strife.

Your Excellency, consider appointing 15 Cabinet Ministers with statecraft that can back you up, redeem the situation and reverse negative perceptions, supported by the new Secretary to the President and Cabinet . In this regard, some of the Ministries would be under Your Excellency's leadership given that you have now cut international trips, and some Ministries could be combined, at least one allocated to Vice-President in order to reduce the size of cabinet.

As regards your leadership approach, we wish to state these words as we did in January 2022. Indecisiveness and slowness to respond to crucial issues remain a great enemy to your leadership legacy. The law gives you all the powers to swiftly make decisions of the state. You may need to

seriously consider your approach. Otherwise, the populace is becoming fade up.

Your Excellency, we continue to admire your levels of tolerance and spirit to enter into dialogue. Your success will be our success – so too, if you fail, the faith community fails.

Finally, we have confidently raised the above issues and recommendations noting that your MCP Manifesto recognizes the role of civil society including faith community. It states that MCP-led government will “facilitate the progressive development of civil society that is *fully capable of holding government accountable and defending citizens’ rights*”. This dialogue with Your Excellency today contributes to such a policy.

We thank you for opening your door for us. God Bless.