

## **MALAWI CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS VISIT 2008**

### **Report on the Visit to Malawi**

The participants on the visit to Malawi were Mary Senior, Assistant Secretary STUC, and Ben Moxham, Project Officer, TUC.

### **Meeting with MCTU General Secretary**

Preliminary meetings were held with Robert Mkwezalamba, the new General Secretary of the MCTU. From this meeting we learned that whilst Malawi has labour laws and regulations, the capacity of the Labour Ministry to enforce and monitor laws was limited, and the capacity of trade unions to ensure that laws are adhered to was also limited.

### **Registrar of Trade Unions and Employers Organisations**

A useful meeting was held with the Registrar at the Labour Ministry, where he outlined his role as registering and overseeing the activity of unions and employer organisations.

It was reported at this meeting that trade unions continued to experience some general hostility from employers, perhaps as a legacy of the regime where unions were outlawed up until 1992-93. The Labour Ministry was facing resource challenges such as a lack of personnel, equipment, IT, and there was a sense that other Government activities were given a higher priority. The continuing problem of child labour was also explored.

### **Labour Commissioner and the Principal Secretary for Labour**

The meeting with the Labour Commissioner and his key civil servant enabled us to pursue further issues on enforcement of the laws. We heard further reports that the Labour Ministry lacks profile and struggles for human and financial resources.

**Department For International Development Malawi Office,  
Charlotte Duncan, Governance Adviser, and Jimmy Kwire  
Programme Manager**

The STUC aims of the visit were outlined, along with a discussion on the Scottish Government interest in Malawi.

The meeting underlined to DFID the important role the MCTU can play in Malawi's development, and also clarified that the draft DFID Country Assistance Plan, had now been approved by the Secretary of State. DFID suggested that it may be able to assist the MCTU in its strategic planning and recognises the role MCTU can play in Malawi's Growth and Development Strategy, and the Development Assistance Strategy.

### **Meeting with the British High Commissioner, Richard Wildash**

The High Commissioner outlined the challenging political situation in Malawi, where the Parliament has not been functioning, it has been difficult to get the Budget through, and a General Election is to be held in May 2009. The High Commissioner is keen to get foreign investment into Malawi, we were more sceptical as to whether this would help trade unions and working people. He did indicate he would be keen to promote any work the STUC took forward with MCTU.

### **Meetings with Affiliate Unions**

STUC met with a couple of the affiliate unions of the MCTU, including the Civil Servants Trade Union, and the Shipping and Customs Clearing Agents Trade Union. A meeting was also held with the Chairperson of the MCTU Women's Committee Kamugholi Zalira. Both the Civil Servants Trade Union and the Shipping Union expressed a strong desire to engage with the corresponding unions in Scotland. Indeed, the MCTU has provided a list of its affiliates, which has been circulated to STUC affiliates, encouraging Scottish unions to make contact with unions in Malawi.

### **STUC – TUC Workshops with MCTU**

Two and a half days of the visit was taken up in workshop sessions with representatives of the MCTU. The first day involved

twelve MCTU representatives, including the General Secretary, President and Treasurer, and representatives from a number of affiliates. An additional twenty representatives joined the workshops for the second day and a half of the workshops, so at least one representative from all the MCTU's twenty affiliates participated. Two days of the workshop focussed on presentations from the trade union centres: MCTU, STUC and TUC; and then detailed discussions on the challenges facing Malawi, and in designing solutions and projects to address these. The final half day of the workshop was led by the TUC to support MCTU to engage with DFID and its Country Assistance Plan.

### **The Way Forward**

From the very intense workshops discussions on challenges and solutions, and from the meetings with the Labour Ministry, DFID and the British High Commission, it is important that any STUC intervention addresses the capacity of the Malawian trade union movement to act and influence, particularly at a workplace level. It is suggested that such capacity issues should be addressed through the recruitment, organisation and training of workplace reps. Enhancing union organisation in Malawi's workplaces should help to address issues of health and safety, gender equality and compliance with labour laws, and provide the MCTU with a co-ordinating role. The STUC is continuing to engage with the MCTU to develop these proposals, and is seeking to meet with Scottish Government officials to get their views, and further information on the next round of the Scottish Government's Malawi Development Fund.