

# **A SADC-Europe Solar Energy Symposium**

**Crossroads Hotel – 20 to 22 Sept 2011**

## **Opening Remarks**

**Honourable Minister,  
Senior Government Officials,  
Your Excellencies,  
Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Ladies and Gentleman;**

It is both a pleasure and an honour for me to address you today on the occasion of the SADC-Europe solar energy symposium.

Energy is one of the 9 priority areas under the new draft Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II, which prescribes that the goal in the energy sector is "to generate and distribute sufficient amount of energy to meet national socio economic demands".

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a very very ambitious goal for Malawi. As most of you know currently only 7% of the Malawi population are having a connection to the power grid, and the total installed generating capacity of the entire country is in the order of 290 MW, where as peak demand already at this moment is estimated to be around 350 MW, and forecast to grow much faster over coming years than the projected growth in generating capacity. As a result, even those of us lucky enough to be in the group of 7% with a grid connection are suffering from frequent power cuts, which little prospects of improvement over the short to medium term. Transmission is seen by many observers as another bottleneck. All development partners welcomed the signing of a so called Compact Agreement between the MCC of the US and the Government with the aim of revitalising the country's power sector for a total value of \$ 350 million. However, while the agreement was signed on 7 April 2011 it has been put on hold on 26 July following the events of 20 July and, to the best of my knowledge, it is still on hold.

Apart from badly needed investments in the Malawi power grid there are other measures that must be considered if Malawi is to meet the demands for power by its citizens. We from the EU have been arguing that a liberalisation of the power sector, including an active support to independent power producers and a re-considering of the country's currently shelved plans to hook up to the Southern African power pool, are among the key elements in this discussion.

Another key element is renewable energy, including in particular solar, and this brings me straight to the topic of this conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen, with a current grid connection rate of 7% it is clear that Malawi will not be able to hook up most of its citizens for many years to come. It is therefore very important for decision makers to consider alternatives, and off-grid solar power can be on these alternatives.

This symposium intends to bring together solar energy experts from Europe and the SADC region with the purpose of an open exchange of views on how we can learn from experiences made elsewhere.

I understand that SADC is currently preparing its own Renewable Energy Strategy and Action Plan, which is undoubtedly an encouraging step in this regard, and we look forward to learning more about progress made to date. I see from the programme that we have a whole range of experts from Africa and Europe present here today, so I believe the framework conditions are in place to make this symposium a success.

We at the EU Delegation Malawi are focussing our development cooperation – with a "division of labour spirit" – on the areas Agriculture/Food Security, road transport and macroeconomic support. However, thanks to the ACP EU Energy Facility, which the EU created to underline the strategic importance of energy for development, we are also currently funding one renewable energy project in the country, the Msamala Sustainable Energy Project, which is being implemented by Concern Universal.

The good news external evaluators tell us that the project is a success in reaching its objectives: 11 schools in remote areas have been provided with solar panels, providing power

to over 8000 students; with a knock on effect of 10% increase in enrolment and academic performance in these schools.

However, and I want to bring this in particular to the attention of our European guests here, the challenges that this type of project is posing in a country like Malawi are not to be underestimated. Among the challenges encountered are these;

- It has been very difficult to find qualified technicians and electricians to install and maintain the equipment;
- The equipment is expensive, and therefore highly sought after and prone to theft;
- Maintenance is a huge challenge due to problems of logistics – mostly transport, fuel and spare parts.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I mention this because while we are all in favour of exchanging good ideas we must be mindful that not everything that has been working in one place of the world is necessarily working also elsewhere – local factors are important and need to be taken into account if solar energy is to be made a useful tool for the ordinary citizen in Malawi and the region, and this is, I believe, what we all came here to contribute to.

Let me close here and just say a big thanks to the organisers – SADC and CAAST-Net. I wish you all the best for this symposium.

Thank you very much.

Zikomo kwambiri.

Horst Pilger  
EU Delegation Malawi  
Horst.Pilger@eeas.europa.eu  
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