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**Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (WESNET) AREA 47 SECTOR 1,**

**P.O Box 3210, Lilongwe, Malawi**

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On behalf of the WESNET, and indeed on my own behalf, I would like to congratulate you and the Vice President, the Right Honorable Dr. Saulos Klaus Chilima for your deserved victory to the high office. The Network is ready to work with your administration in the realization of the Sustainable Development Goal targets on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) towards 2030.

Firstly, let me take this opportunity to introduce the Network to you, your Excellency. WESNET is a member-organization that brings together over 100 NGOs, private sector, academia and individuals working in Water and Environmental Sanitation related areas.  The Network strives to promote quality service delivery for sustainable water and environmental sanitation in the country. In all its work, the network complements government efforts in delivering WASH services to Malawians following the principles of Equality and Non Discrimination and Leaving No One Behind.

As you may surmise, we passionately believe water, sanitation and hygiene are at the centre of everything!

The importance of water, sanitation and hygiene to Malawi’s economic growth, social stability and people’s health cannot be overemphasized. From international commitments such as the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals to Malawi’s own Growth and Development Strategy III, water, sanitation and hygiene are often touted as crucial to Malawi’s socio-economic survival. This acknowledgment stems from the further recognition of how other strategically important sectors, such as energy, manufacturing, health, education, food security, nutrition and tourism, are underpinned and reinforced by functional and thriving water resources management. Furthermore, Your Excellency, we also realize as Malawi is developing, her population is growing, trading centers transform into towns, towns into cities, and the effects of climate change intensify, the demand for water for domestic use, industrial production, sanitation and hygiene services will continue to increase. In other words, water, sanitation and hygiene are the threshold limitations to sustained economic growth, poverty eradication, healthy futures (particularly in this time as COVID-19 wreaks havoc on people’s lives and livelihoods) and environmental safety. I do not have to mention the pivotal role water plays in the fabric of rural community life; something that you yourself, Your Excellency, have had first-hand experience of in your own childhood years.

Therefore, Your Excellency, it is imperative water, sanitation and hygiene, which are of cross-cutting strategic importance, are accorded the necessary attention, investment and singular effort to ensure effective stewardship for a sustainable water future, safety of environments and hygienic living conditions for generations to come. **Therefore, having a stand-alone Government Ministry with the legislative mandate, and commensurate resource provisions, to ensure the realization of this imperative is inescapable.**

It is against this background, Your Excellency, that we, as a Network, note with great concern that the Irrigation and Water Development Ministry, which had been recently been unbundled away from Agriculture by your predecessor, has not been clearly elaborated in your recent Cabinet Appointments. Such a state of affairs, if not clarified or reversed, will continue an unfortunate legacy of under-prioritization of water, sanitation and hygiene in the national agenda which has, historically, led to, among others, underfunding of water, sanitation and hygiene services to less than 1% of the national budget resulting in sub-par service delivery for rural populations and continued degradation of water-dependent ecosystems. Therefore, Your Excellency, we strongly, and in no uncertain terms, **implore your administration to reconsider its position and re-establish the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development as a stand-alone Ministry** to ensure water, sanitation and hygiene are given the priority they duly deserve, which has been lacking during past administrations.

 **Long Live Genuine Democracy**

Willies Chanozga Mwandira

**National Coordinator – Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (WESNET)**