

**LATEST NEWS # 370, September 19, 2006**

**The following news concerns Malawi.**

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## **‘You cannot open this Bible, but it is not a closed book’**

By the Rev Dr Francois Sieberhagen, UBS Media Consultant

**MALAWI** — The Bible Society of Malawi’s Bible Week program for this year began on a high note with a ceremony at Kamuzu Stadium in Blantyre to dedicate the First Audio Bible in Chichewa, one of the country’s three official languages. This product, funded by the United Bible Societies’ *Opportunity 21* Final Phase, will bring the Scriptures directly to people who cannot read them for themselves.

Among the guests at the launch on September 2 was Paul Hoekstra, Vice-President of Talking Bibles International.

“For many people the Bible is a closed book because they cannot read or cannot see the text,” he told the audience. “You cannot open this Bible, but it is not a closed book. You can listen to it and hear the same words as in the printed Bible.”

Also present was the Honourable Chief Justice of Malawi, Leonard Unyolo. He, too, spoke about the importance of interacting with God’s Word.

“As we reflect on this new tool that comes to the Church, it’s my prayer that we will not just be technologically familiar in navigating through the Word of God electronically, but seek to discern its most holy learning and seek to love and fear the Lord. We must forever be near our God as we interact with him in his Word.”

Along with Selections from the Old and New Testaments, the Chichewa First Audio Bible offers an introduction to each Testament and bridging material that introduces each Selection. This pocket-size digital playback device, which resembles a closed Bible, is a great breakthrough, according to Dr Gerrit van Steenbergen, who was the Translation Consultant for the project.

“Not only will people be brought into contact with the Old Testament, but they will now be helped to understand better what they are hearing,” he said. “The First Audio Bible is designed to be user-friendly and the playback device is top quality. It is easy to operate and the sound is crystal clear. People will definitely be able to interact with the Word.”



The first people to receive a Chichewa First Audio Bible following its launch live in Rivirivi, near Balaka, north of Blantyre. Here, visitors from the Bible Society of Malawi, the Scottish Bible Society and Talking Bibles International saw Saizi Moyo, a local blind man, joyfully receive the first unit. When it was switched on and the members of Mr Moyo's *Faith Comes By Hearing* listening group who were crowding round began to hear the clear sounds it produces, they fell silent and listened with great appreciation.



Bible Society General Secretary Clapperton Mayuni was equally enthusiastic.

“It’s a great joy to me to see this group of people being the first beneficiaries of the ‘closed’ open Bible,” he said.

He went on to talk about the Society’s longer-term plans for distributing the Chichewa First Audio Bible.

“We have 1000 units and we will distribute them among the visually impaired first of all. The second group to benefit will be families in rural villages, where people suffer because of poverty and lack of reading skills. I am praying that we will be able to secure more funding to bring in more units so that more people can interact with the Word in this manner. I am also encouraged by the number of city folk that have expressed interest in acquiring the First Audio Bible and also the Talking Bible, which uses the same format.”

Bible Week continued under the theme ‘God’s Living Word, Life for All’ with events including Bible marches from five points in Blantyre. It concluded with the launch of the Sena Bible. (604 words – MALAWI.19.09.06)

*Photos (Talking Bibles International/Paul Hoekstra)*

*MAI06DJ-87: The Chichewa First Audio Bible is dedicated with a prayer at its launch in Blantyre on September 2, 2006. Looking on is the Honourable Chief Justice of Malawi, Leonard Unyolo.*

*MAI06DJ-94: Saizi Moyo received the first Chichewa First Audio Bible that was distributed after the dedication ceremony in Blantyre on September 2, 2006. He lives in Rivirivi, near Balaka, north of Blantyre. Malawi.*

*MAI06DJ-97: Children from the Nazarene Church at Rivirivi, near Balaka, north of Blantyre, holding a Chichewa First Audio Bible. This church was the location for the first distribution that took place after the launch of the product in Blantyre on September 2, 2006. Malawi.*

*MAI06DJ-98: A child from the Nazarene Church at Rivirivi, near Balaka, north of Blantyre, holding a Chichewa First Audio Bible. This church was the location for the first distribution that took place after the launch of the product in Blantyre on September 2, 2006. Malawi.*

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