



Madonna

## Madonna takes kids back to Malawi to open hospital

### MALAWI

#### Blantyre

US pop superstar Madonna on Tuesday took her four adopted Malawian children to the opening of a paediatric hospital wing that her charity has built in their home country.

Standing alongside President Peter Mutharika, she unveiled a plaque to mark the completion of the 50-bed facility in Malawi's second city of Blantyre.

The Mercy James Institute of Paediatric Surgery and Intensive Care, named after one of her children, has taken two years to build and includes three specialist operating theatres.

It is the first health unit for children in Malawi and will double the capacity for paediatric care at the Queen Elizabeth hospital.

Earlier this year Madonna, 58, adopted twin girls from an orphanage in Malawi, where she has been a regular visitor for several years.

The four-year-old twins Estere and Stella, joined her other Malawian children Mercy James and David Banda, both aged 11.

Madonna, who set up her "Raising Malawi" charity in 2006, was greeted by traditional dancers and given a tour of the hospital, which was decorated with national flags and bunting.

The wards have been designed with murals, including images of Nelson Mandela and archbishop Desmond Tutu, while US actor Leonardo DiCaprio was listed on a wall as a major benefactor.

Mutharika cut a blue ceremonial ribbon and held it up to the cheering crowd.

### A chance of survival

Madonna has not always been welcomed with open arms in one of the world's poorest countries, where activists accuse her of using her wealth to short-cut the adoption process.

In 2013, she was stripped of her official VIP status in Malawi by then president Joyce Banda's government, which accused her of being "uncouth" and expecting gratitude for her adoptions.

President Mutharika has since moved to repair the relationship, previously saying his government had "always been grateful for the passion Madonna has for the country".

The singer, who divorced film director Guy Ritchie in 2008, now has six children after adopting the twins.

Court documents detailed how the twins were taken in by an orphanage supported by Madonna's charity. Their mother died soon after childbirth, their father left to marry another woman and their grandmother struggled to look after several children.

"Malawi needs such kind-hearted people to prosper," Malita Ndau, a 20-year-old woman who sells doughnuts in Blantyre, told AFP.

"Malawian children will now have a chance of survival because of this hospital."

However, some Malawians said the hospital highlighted the country's failures.

Malawi should "be ashamed for begging from her to build this facility because we have failed to tame corruption," said Mumbo Phiri, who sells second-hand clothes.

The new hospital wing opened last week and has already performed its first surgery.

AFP