

# General Facts on Malawi

**Situated in southeastern Africa, the Republic of Malawi is bordered by Tanzania in the north, Mozambique in the east and south, and Zambia in the west.**

**The total land area is about 118,484 sq km (45,747 sq mi), of which nearly one-fifth is covered with water. The beautiful **lake Nyasa (Malawi)** which forms a large part of the country's eastern border with Mozambique, is the third-largest lake in Africa and covers an area of approximately 28 000 sq km.**

**Often referred to as the "Heart of Africa", Malawi has a population of some 9,9 million (1998) people who speak a total of fourteen different languages.**

- [Brief History](#)
- [General Statistics](#)
- [Religious Statistics](#)

## Brief History

Archaeological discoveries around Lake Nyasa (Lake Malawi) indicate that human settlements existed in the area at least as far back as the Stone Age and Iron Age. In the first millennium AD Bantu peoples from the north, pushed southward by wars, disease and hunger, began settling in the area.

The first and probably largest identifiable group to make their new home in what is now Malawi, were the Maravi-people who moved their sometime between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries under the leadership of Chief Kalonga. They soon became known as the "Chewa", a word derived from the word "Cheva" or "Sheva" (meaning foreigners), and were the ancestors of modern-day Malawi's largest ethnic group – the Chewa.

Tribes such as the Tumbuka, Yao, Tonga, Lomwe, and Ngoni probably moved into Malawi long after the Maravi had successfully established itself. Chief Kalonga founded a prospering empire, known as the Maravi Empire, from which modern-day Malawi derives its name. Surplus agricultural products as well as ivory were traded with Arab and later with Portuguese traders who frequented the coast of Mozambique.

Chief Kalonga also extended his influence by acquiring more land and sending his relatives to establish settlements on it. In this way, they spread through the central and southern part of present-day Malawi, into the western parts of Mozambique and into eastern Zambia. Over a period of time, these groups started to identify themselves by different names, and became known as the aNyanja (Chewa for "lake people"), aChipeta ("savanna people"), aNyassa (Yao for "lake people"), etc.

However, peace and prosperity did not reign indefinitely. Soon, Arab slave traders and their African collaborators started raiding the area and forcefully abducted men, women and children from their villages and sold them as slaves. Over a period of time literally hundreds of thousands of people were carried away to the slave-markets of the Middle East and Europe.

Christianity first came to the area when David Livingstone, the Scottish missionary and explorer, reached the shores of Lake Nyasa (Yao for "lake" or "sea", presently called Lake Malawi) in 1859.

By 1875 the first Scottish mission-stations were established and in 1883 Great Britain stationed a consul in what was then known as Nyasaland.

However, regular clashes with the Arab slave traders who continued their activities and fear of Portuguese expansion from Mozambique prompted Britain to negotiate treaties with several tribal leaders and led to the declaration of a British protectorate in 1891. Named the British Central African Protectorate, Harry Johnston, British explorer and botanist, became the first commissioner. In 1907 the name was changed to the Nyasaland Protectorate.

British settlers introduced coffee to the area and soon established thriving plantations. However, the introduction of a "hut tax" and efforts to discourage African farmers to use their traditional agricultural methods of "slash and burn", led to mounting resistance among certain parts of the African population. This came to an outburst during the First World War when Africans were forced to participate in Great Britain's war effort. Under the leadership of John Chilembwe, an African preacher and nationalist, a bloody uprising took place in Blantyre, which was soon suppressed by the local Police.

Nationalist movements continued to gain strength and in the 1950's the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) was formed in opposition to colonial rule. In 1953 Nyasaland became part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland with Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia) and Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe). The NAC, now under the leadership of Dr Hastings Banda, was on the forefront of opposition against the formation of this colonial federation.

In spite of a state of emergency being declared (during which Banda and others were imprisoned) and brutal actions to suppress the nationalists, the colonial government had no choice to invite Banda and others to participate in a constitutional conference in 1961. Consequently, the federation was dissolved in 1963 and Nyasaland was granted internal self-government.

On July 6, 1964, the country became independent and was officially renamed Malawi. Two years later on July 6, 1966, it became a republic with Dr Hastings Banda as president. The constitution was amended in 1970 to make Banda "president for life".

The first elections since independence were held in 1978, but, as in elections which were to follow in 1983, 1987 and 1992, participation was restricted to Banda's Malawi Congress party (MDC). However, resistance to Banda's autocratic style mounted and in 1994 a new constitution was approved.

In Malawi's first multiparty elections the same year, Bakili Muluzi's United Democratic Front (UDF) defeated Banda and Muluzi became the country's new president.

## General Statistics

Population: - 9 933 868 (1998 census)

Population growth rate: - 2 %

Infant mortality rate: - 122.28 deaths/1,000 live births (2000 estimate)

Life expectancy at birth:

- Total population – 37,58 years

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male – 37,2 years</li> <li>• Female – 37,98 years</li> </ul>
Total fertility rate:	- 5,33 children born/woman (2000 estimate)
People Groups:	- Nyanja-Chewa (3,2 mil); Lomwe (1,6 mil); Yao (1 mil); Ngoni (760 000); Tumbuka (660 000); Nkhonde (300 000); Sena (260 000); Tonga (220 000); Lambaya (41 000); and Mpoto (40 000).
Literacy:	- 58 % (USA 95 %; UK 97 %; RSA 64 %)
Language	- Chewa (national language) & English (official language). Total of 14 languages, of which Chewa (57 %), Nyanja (13 %), Yao (10 %) and Tumbuka (9 %) are most comonly spoken in homes.
Total Land Area:	- 1 18 484 sq. km (USA: 9 529 000; UK 244 000; RSA: 1 222 000)
Economy:	- Mining, commercial farming, industry.
Export-commodities	- Tobacco, tea, sugar, cotton, coffee, peanuts, wood products
Export-partners:	- South Africa 15%, US 9%, Germany 9%, Netherlands 7%, Japan.
Import-partners	- South Africa 38%, Zimbabwe 18%, Zambia 8%, Japan 4%, US, UK, Germany.
Labor force:	- 4,5 million (1998 census)
Labor by occupation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture – 78 %</li> <li>• Wage earners – 12 %</li> </ul>
Population below poverty line	- 54% (1990-91 est.)
Natural resources:	- Limestone, arable land, hydropower, unexploited deposits of uranium, coal, and bauxite.
Independance:	- 6 July 1964 from United Kingdom
Government type:	- Multiparty democracy.
Capital:	- Lilongwe (220 300 inhabitants)
Administrative divisions:	- 24 districts; Blantyre, Chikwawa, Chiradzulu, Chitipa, Dedza, Dowa, Karonga, Kasungu, Lilongwe, Machinga (Kasupe), Mangochi, Mchinji, Mulanje, Mwanza, Mzimba, Ntcheu, Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota, Nsanje, Ntchisi, Rumphu, Salima, Thyolo, Zomba NOTE: there may soon be three new districts named Balaka, Likoma, and Phalombe.

## Religious Statistics (1995)

Religious freedom is guaranteed in the constitution. However, missionaries and other foreign groups sometimes experience hostility from government officials who regard them as unnecessary intruders.

Christian - 80 % (growth 7,1 %)

Christian Detail

- Protestant – 35 % (growth 6,8 %)
- Roman Catholic - 25 % (growth 5,3 %)
- African Indigenous Churches - 19 % (growth 11,2 %)
- Other Marginal groups – 1 %
- Total Denominations – 53
- Largest Groups: Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Seventh-day Adventist, Anglican Church, Baptist Convention, Church of Christ, African Baptist Assembly, United Evangelical Church, Independent Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Evangelical Baptist Church, Free Methodist Church.

Traditional Religions - 5,5 %

Muslim - 13 %

Other - 1,5 % (including Baha'i and Hindu)

NOTE: An unknown percentage of Malawi's population adhere to syncretic Christianity (a mixture of Christianity and traditional beliefs). This would bring the actual percentage of Christians and Muslims down considerably.