

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 329/92 (AFR 36/40/92, 22 October 1992) - and follow-ups AFR 36/41/92 of 4 November 1992 and AFR 36/44/92 of 9 November 1992.

- Death in custody of prisoner of conscience/fear for physical safety/fear of harassment

MALAWI:Orton CHIRWA, aged 73, lawyer and politician (died in custody
20 October 1992)

Vera CHIRWA, female, aged 60, lawyer and politician

Reverend Aaron LONGWE, presbyterian minister

a schoolboy

a school receptionist

Vera Chirwa was released from prison on 24 January 1993 after 12 years' imprisonment. She was pardoned by Life-President Kamuzu Banda on humanitarian grounds. She is currently believed to be staying with relatives in Blantyre, Malawi. Her release follows international appeals on her behalf, including a new campaign by Amnesty International, and a resolution by the European Parliament calling for her release.

Vera Chirwa and her husband Orton Chirwa were leaders of the exile Malawi Freedom Movement. In 1981 they were charged with treason after having reportedly been abducted from Zambia where they were living in exile. They were both convicted in a grossly unfair trial and sentenced to death and adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for their non-violent political opinions. Following international appeals, their death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Orton Chirwa died in prison in October 1992 and there still has not been an inquest, which the Malawian authorities are obliged by law to carry out. Rumours that he was unlawfully killed have not been corroborated. The precise cause of death has not been made known and the question as to whether his death was due to harsh prison conditions or medical neglect remains unresolved. Vera Chirwa had also been in poor health in prison.

The schoolboy and school receptionist arrested on 29 October 1992 in connection with the arrest of the Reverend Aaron Longwe, a leading member of the opposition Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), are believed to have been quickly released, but we have no further details about them. The charge of incitement which was laid against the Reverend Aaron Longwe has not yet proceeded to trial.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION

No further action is requested on this case by the Urgent Action network. Amnesty International will pursue its concern about an inquest into Orton Chirwa's death with the Malawian authorities through other means.
Thank you to all those who sent appeals.