

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Please bring this action to the attention of the person in your section responsible for outreach work as it is felt that appeals from church organizations may be particularly effective.

UA 136/92

Legal concern

30 April 1992

MALAWI:

Mervyn MAPENDA - architect

George THAKA - telecommunications employee

Two Roman Catholic priests

Reverend MSOWOYA - presbyterian church minister

Amnesty International has received reports of the arrest in late April 1992 of the people listed above, because of their suspected support for political reform in Malawi. Their present whereabouts are not known. It is likely that they are being held without charge and there are fears that they may be ill-treated.

Mervyn Mapenda, an architect from Blantyre, was arrested on 21 April 1992 because he is alleged to have expressed support for a multi-party political system. George Thaka, who works for a telecommunications company, was arrested at about the same time and probably for similar reasons.

Two Roman Catholic priests from Mzuzu in northern Malawi, whose names are not known to Amnesty International, are also reported to have been arrested recently. This appears to be a reprisal for the pastoral letter issued by the country's Roman Catholic bishops on 8 March 1992, criticizing various aspects of the government's human rights record. (See UA 90/92, AFR 36/06/92, 16 March 1992). Reverend Msowoya, a minister in the Church of Central Africa (Presbyterian) (CCAP), who is also from northern Malawi, is believed to have been arrested because of the support his church has given to the Roman Catholic bishops.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Malawi is a one-party state, ruled by the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) which is headed by Life-President Dr H. Kamuzu Banda. No independent political activity or freedom of expression is permitted and detention without trial of government opponents is routine and widespread. The Roman Catholic bishops' pastoral letter was the first public expression of dissent within Malawi since 1964 and has proved to be a catalyst for other criticism of the government, notably from university students. The bishops themselves were interrogated about their letter, which was then declared seditious, and there were public calls for their execution from senior party figures. On 18 April 1992, two Irish Roman Catholic priests were expelled from Malawi, one of them Monsignor John Roche, who was a signatory to the pastoral letter. At about the same time, a South African minister in the CCAP, Reverend Ryk van Veerden, was also expelled from the country.

On 6 April 1992, Chakufwa Chihana, a trade union official who had publicly supported the Roman Catholic bishops and called for an end to the MCP's monopoly of power, was arrested at the airport in Lilongwe as he returned from attending meetings in

Zambia (see UA 114/92, AFR 36/09/92, 6 April 1992 and most recent follow-up AFR 36/13/92, 30 April 1992). On 28 April 1992 the government closed Chancellor College, which is part of the University of Malawi, after student protests. The college had only just reopened. It had been closed in mid-March after student demonstrations in support of the bishops. Amnesty International is concerned about reports that students arrested after the earlier protests were tortured.

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RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- requesting information about the whereabouts and legal basis for the detention of Mervyn Mapenda and the other people listed above;
- seeking assurances that they are physically safe and have access to visits from their families and lawyers of their choice;
- calling for them to be immediately released if they are not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought promptly and fairly to trial.

APPEALS TO:

1) H E The Life-President Ngwazi Dr H. Kamuzu Banda
Office of the President and Cabinet
P/Bag 301
Lilongwe 3
Malawi

Your Excellency

Telegrams: Life-President Banda Lilongwe, Malawi
Telexes: 4389 PRES MI
Faxes: + 265 731878

2) Hon. J Z U Tembo
Minister of State in the Office of the President
P/Bag 301
Lilongwe 3
Malawi

Dear Minister

Telegrams: Minister of State Tembo, Lilongwe, Malawi

3) Mr MacWilliam Lunguzi
Inspector-General of Police

Dear Sir

P/Bag 305
Lilongwe 3
Malawi

Telegrams: Inspector-General of Police Lunguzi, Lilongwe, Malawi

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Most Reverend James Chiona
Archbishop of Blantyre
PO Box 385
Blantyre
Malawi

Newspaper:
The Editor
Odini

PO Box 133
Lilongwe
Malawi

The General Secretary
Church of Central Africa (Presbyterian)
Livingstonia Synod
PO Box 112
Mzuzu
Malawi

and to diplomatic representatives of Malawi in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 June 1992.