

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 141/92 Legal concern

6 May 1992

MALAWI: Reverend Aaron LONGWE, presbyterian church minister
Chiyenda MKANDAWIRE, presbyterian church elder

Two officials of the Church of Central Africa (Presbyterian) (CCAP) have been detained without charge apparently as part of the Malawian Government's suppression of public criticism. Reverend Aaron Longwe and Chiyenda Mkandawire were arrested in Lilongwe on 29 or 30 April 1992 and are held at Maula Prison, reportedly without charge. There are reports that Reverend Longwe's wife and three children are being held under house arrest. Reverend Longwe had previously been arrested on 27 April 1992 and held for a day. Both men are from the Mzuzu congregation of the CCAP, in northern Malawi.

The precise reason for their detention has not been stated, but it is clearly connected with the recent public upsurge of criticism of the government's human rights record. CCAP members have supported calls for greater freedom of expression contained in a pastoral letter issued on 8 March 1992 by the country's Roman Catholic bishops. One of the signatories of that letter was the Bishop of Mzuzu, Monsignor John Roche, who was expelled from Malawi on 18 April 1992.

On 26 April 1992 Reverend Longwe is reported to have preached on the theme of a biblical text from the book of Micah: "The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains."

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. At about the same time that Monsignor Roche was expelled from Malawi, a South African minister in the CCAP, Reverend Ryk van Veerden, was also deported.

Life-President Banda is himself a presbyterian and was at one time an elder in the Church of Scotland.

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 and airmail letters:

- requesting information about the legal basis for the detention of Reverend Aaron Longwe and Chiyenda Mkandawire;
- 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 released if they are not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought promptly and fairly to trial;
- seeking assurances that there are no restrictions on the freedom of movement of Mrs Longwe and her children.

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

Telegrams: Life-President Banda Lilongwe, Malawi
Telexes: 44389 PRES MI; 44766 JUSTICE MI; 44113 EXTERNAL MI
Faxes: + 265 731878
[Salutation: Your Excellency]

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

Telegrams: Minister of State Tembo, Lilongwe, Malawi
[Salutation: Dear Minister]

3) Mr MacWilliam Lunguzi
Inspector-General of Police
P/Bag 305
Lilongwe 3
Malawi

Telegrams: Inspector-General of Police Lunguzi, Lilongwe, Malawi
[Salutation: Dear Sir]

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

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 17 June 1992.