

URGENT ACTION

CRACKDOWN FEARS FOR MALAWI PROTESTS

Demonstrators may be at risk of being killed or seriously injured if police use excessive force to break up protests due to take place in Malawi on 17 August. In July, at least 18 protestors were killed when police fired live bullets to break up demonstrations organized by civic groups.

On 17 August, Malawian human rights activists, students and members of civil society are planning to stage peaceful demonstrations across the country to protest against a wide range of concerns including repressive laws, poor governance, and fuel shortages.

During previous nationwide demonstrations on 20 July, at least 18 people were killed and several people, including children, were injured after police used live ammunition in several of Malawi's major cities to break up the protests. In the northern town of Mzuzu alone, nine people were killed and at least 44 people, including six children, suffered gunshot wounds. Under UN policing standards, security forces must not use firearms except where there is no less extreme means of defence against an imminent threat of death or serious injury, or to prevent crimes causing threat to life.

Around 500 people were arrested in connection with the protests, including several human rights activists, who were briefly detained on 20 July and released without charge. At least eight journalists were beaten by police using gun butts, resulting in serious injuries including head injuries.

The planned demonstrations on 17 August are taking place against a backdrop of increased harassment and intimidation of civil society activists and other dissenting voices in Malawi. After the recent protests in July, several prominent human rights activists have gone into hiding, in fear for their safety. This followed hostile statements against Malawian NGOs by the President Bingu wa Mutharika in which he threatened to "smoke out" the organizers, calling the protests "the work of Satan."

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to allow peaceful protests to take place without fear of violent reprisals, arbitrary arrests or intimidation by security forces and that any use of force is proportionate
- Calling for immediate, impartial and thorough investigations into police conduct during the 20 July protests, in which 18 people were killed and scores injured after police fired live ammunition at the demonstrators
- Expressing concern about harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders, civil society and individuals expressing dissenting views and calling on the Malawian Government to respect the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly,

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 17 AUGUST 2011 TO:

Minister of Home Affairs and Public Security
Aaron Sangala
Ministry of Home Affairs and Public Security
Private Bag 331, Lilongwe 3
Malawi
Fax: +265 1 789 509
Salutation: Your Excellency

President and Chief of the Police Service
Bingu wa Mutharika
Office of the President
Capital Hill Circle
Private Bag 301, Lilongwe 3
Malawi
Fax: +265 1 788 456; +256 1 773 728
Email: opc@malawi.gov.mw
Salutation: Your Excellency

Inspector General of Police
Peter Mukhito
Malawi Police Services Headquarters
Lilongwe
Malawi
Fax: + 265 1 797 979; +265 1 796 835
Salutation: Dear Inspector General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since June, Malawi has faced a severe fuel shortage, one of a recurrent number of crippling shortages since 2009.

Name: Demonstrators

Gender m/f: - Both

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