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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 117/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - MALAWI

PLEASE NOTE: CORRECTION - SEE NEWS SERVICE 116/94 - The first line in paragraph 3 should read "Since 1 May when the conflict was sparked off by a land dispute in Qala Diza in Sulaimaniya Province..."

PLEASE NOTE: The Legal and Intergovernmental Organizations Program (LIGOP) at the IS have informed us that the external document on corporal punishment referred to in News Service 70/94 (Singapore item) has been postponed indefinitely. They are looking at when it can be rescheduled but they have no fixed date at the moment.

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

USA - 14 June - SEE NEWS SERVICE 114/94

Turkey - 30 June - SEE NEWS SERVICE 104/94

Pakistan - 27 July - PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE. SEE NEWS SERVICE 81/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

MOROCCO - 31 MAY - SEE NEWS SERVICES 114/94 AND 105/94

Denmark - 15 June - SEE NEWS SERVICE 105/94

Mozambique - 23 June - SEE NEWS SERVICE 115/94

Myanmar - 20 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 99/94

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Annual Report - 7 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

**News Service 117/94**

**AI INDEX: AFR 36/WU 04/94**

**3 JUNE 1994**

**MALAWI: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES REFORMS PROMISED BY NEW PRESIDENT**

Amnesty International has welcomed the decision of newly-elected President Bakili Muluzi to commute to life imprisonment all death sentences in Malawi, which last month made the transition from harsh one-party rule to multi-party democracy. About 120 prisoners on death row will benefit immediately, although there may be as many as 300 as yet untried capital cases where the death penalty could be imposed.

"This transition could be a time for positive change, especially if Human rights become a priority, so we are urging the government to move ahead with the abolition of the death penalty as a matter of urgency", Amnesty International said.

President Muluzi's United Democratic Front (UDF) opposition party, which was formed last year when a referendum ended the one-party system, won 84 of the country's 177 parliamentary seats in the 17 May election and was elected President in a separate vote.

Giving special focus to human rights in his inauguration speech on 21 May, President Muluzi commuted the death sentences of all those convicted at unfair trials in Traditional Courts. The death sentences were already suspended in the process of reforming the Traditional Court system.

President Muluzi also ordered the release of any remaining political prisoners and the closure of three notorious prisons used to detain, torture and execute thousands of opponents of former Malawi president Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda during more than 30 years of rule by his Malawi Congress Party (MCP).

In a letter to President Muluzi urging full abolition of the death penalty, Amnesty International said it looked forward to human rights being given high priority in Malawi, where a new constitution will contain an entrenched Bill of Rights. The new government contains former prisoners of conscience such as Aleke Banda (Minister of Finance), Brown Mpinganjira (Minister of Information) and Dr George Mtafu (Minister of Health).

There are also human rights and democracy activists in the new parliament representing the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) opposition party, which gained 36 seats. AFORD leader Chakufwa Chihana, a prisoner of conscience up to mid-1993, lost the presidential election to the UDF leader. Dr Banda's former ruling Malawi Congress Party (MCP), with 55 seats, is now the main opposition party. ENDS\