

# URGENT ACTION

## DEMONSTRATIONS POSTPONED AFTER DISCUSSIONS

**Demonstrations that were scheduled to take place in Malawi on 17 August were postponed by participants after a dialogue was facilitated between members of civil society and the government. Amnesty International had expressed fears for the safety of participants in the planned peaceful demonstrations.**

Malawian human rights activists, students and members of civil society had been planning to stage peaceful demonstrations across the country on 17 August against a wide range of concerns including repressive laws, poor governance, and fuel shortages. These demonstrations were postponed after resident and visiting United Nations (UN) representatives facilitated a dialogue between representatives of civil society organizations and the Presidential Committee on Contact and Dialogue, which acts as negotiator on behalf of the Malawian government.

According to a joint communiqué released after the meeting, both parties agreed to maintain a process of dialogue, with UN support, to discuss the demonstrators' grievances. Both parties also agreed that a peaceful demonstration could be held within a period of four weeks and that the date for this may be reviewed according to the progress of the dialogue.

News of the planned demonstrations prompted Amnesty International to issue a pre-emptive urgent action calling on the police and government authorities to show restraint. At least 18 people were killed and numerous others injured in the previous round of nationwide demonstrations on 20 July when police used live ammunition to break up the protests in several of the cities and beat journalists that were covering the event. There was further reason to fear for the safety of participants in these demonstrations due to the rising level of harassment and intimidation against civil society activists and dissenting voices in Malawi, with several prominent human rights activists going into hiding and hostile statements against Malawian NGOs made by the President Bingu wa Mutharika.

**Many thanks to all who sent appeals. No further action is required at this time. Amnesty International will continue to monitor the situation.**

This is the first update of UA 244/11. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR36/001/2011/en>

Name: Demonstrators

Gender m/f: Both

Further information on UA: 244/11 Index: 36/002/2011 Issue Date: 19 August 2011

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