

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AFR 36/06/92

Distr: UA/SC

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 90/92 Fear of Extrajudicial Execution

16 March 1992

**MALAWI Archbishop James CHIONA, Roman Catholic Archbishop of
Blantyre**

Bishop F MKHORI }
Bishop M A CHIMOLE }
Bishop A ASSOLARI } Roman Catholic bishops
Bishop A CHAMGWERA }
Bishop G M CHISENDERA }
Monsignor John ROCHE }

Amnesty International is concerned that Archbishop James Chiona and the other Roman Catholic clergy named above may be in danger of extrajudicial execution as a consequence of their Lenten pastoral letter criticizing human rights violations. Reports indicate that a meeting of senior government officials on 11 March 1992 discussed whether the bishops should be killed.

Archbishop Chiona and the six other bishops were the signatories of a Lenten pastoral letter read out in Roman Catholic churches across the country on Sunday 8 March 1992, which criticized the government's human rights record. On 10 March, they were summoned to police headquarters in Blantyre and reportedly questioned for eight hours (see UA 86/92, AFR 36/05/92, 12 March 1992). They were subsequently put under house arrest at the Archbishop's House in Blantyre but have now been allowed to return to their dioceses.

The government has declared the pastoral letter a seditious publication, making possession of the document a criminal offence. Amnesty International has received unconfirmed reports of people being arrested for having a copy of the letter.

The government response to the pastoral letter has been expressed in inflammatory language. An editorial in the official *Malawi News*, entitled "No Mercy", describes the authors of the pastoral letter as "Mafia-style crooks", who were aiming to "import IRA [Irish Republican Army] terrorism into this country". Amnesty International fears that such statements will be taken by members of the paramilitary Malawi Young Pioneers or the ruling Malawi Congress Party as a licence to commit acts of violence against the bishops or other individual Roman Catholics. The persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses church in the 1960s and 1970s was conducted with a similar combination of inflammatory official statements and local attacks in which Jehovah's Witnesses were killed and their property burned.

Prominent government opponents have been killed in "death squad" attacks, including

Mkwapatira Mhango, an exiled journalist who died in 1989 along with his wives and children, when his house in Zambia was firebombed. In 1983 three government ministers and a member of parliament were killed after they had criticized John Tembo, the present Minister of State in the President's Office. Their death was officially described as a road accident, but they were last seen alive in custody at Mikuyu Prison.

Page 2 of UA 90/92

Latest reports received by Amnesty International indicate that on the morning of 16 March 1992 police opened fire on students at Chancellor College in Zomba who were demonstrating in support of the Roman Catholic bishops. Unconfirmed reports suggest that some students may have died as a result. The government is reported to have closed the college, which is part of the University of Malawi.

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

- seeking assurances from the government that it will guarantee the safety of the signatories to the Roman Catholic bishops' Lenten pastoral letter and asking it to state publicly that acts of violence against members of the Roman Catholic church are unlawful;

- seeking assurances that no one will be arrested, prosecuted or persecuted for possession of the Lenten pastoral letter, which is a non-violent expression of religious and political opinions.

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
P/Bag 305
Lilongwe 3
Malawi

Dear Sir

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

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 27 April 1992.