

EXTERNAL

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Fear for safety / Prisoners of conscience

19 March 1996

**ZAMBIA** Fred M'membe, editor in chief of *The Post*

**Bright Mwape, managing editor of *The Post***

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Lawyers for Fred M'membe, editor in chief of *The Post*, and Bright Mwape, managing editor of *The Post*, say they have a well-founded fear that the two journalists may be abducted from prison by state security agents and tortured. M'membe is currently being held at Lusaka Central Prison in Lusaka, while Mwape is being held at Mpima Prison in Kabwe. Both are prisoners of conscience being held solely for the peaceful expression of their criticism of the Zambian government in their newspaper articles.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Fred M'membe and Bright Mwape, given last year's admission by the government's own commission of inquiry that torture remains a widespread practice by police in Zambia. The lawyers for Fred M'membe and Bright Mwape allege that reliable information from government insiders indicates that special branch agents have been discussing a plan to abduct one or both of the journalists to interrogate them regarding the sources for investigative articles critical to the government.

In addition to that possible threat to their safety, appalling prison conditions in Zambia pose a threat to the health and lives of inmates such as Fred M'membe and Bright Mwape. Prisoners in Zambia are often severely malnourished and are exposed to tuberculosis, scabies and dysentery.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Both Fred M'membe and Bright Mwape are being held in indefinite detention as prisoners of conscience until they formally plead for forgiveness from the Zambian National Assembly, after they were found guilty of "contempt of parliament" in a 20 February 1996 ruling by Speaker of the Assembly Dr Robinson Nabulyato. Amnesty International believes Fred M'membe and Bright Mwape to be prisoners of conscience, solely imprisoned for peacefully expressing in newspaper articles their criticism of remarks made by Vice President Godfrey Miyanda in parliament in January 1996.

Over the past few years, the government has made a series of arrests and charges against Fred M'membe and other staff at *The Post*, which fit into a pattern of misuse of criminal charges in an attempt to intimidate the independent press in Zambia and suppress criticism of government officials and policies.

Amnesty International has received reports of Zambian police beating suspects during interrogation or arrest. In 1993, when government opponents were detained under a state of emergency declared by President Frederick Chiluba on the grounds that a coup plot had been uncovered, three detainees alleged that they were tortured. In particular, opposition figure Cuthbert N'guni alleged that he was taken out of prison and beaten by state security agents.

In response to such allegations, the government launched a Human Rights Commission, headed by lawyer Bruce Munyama, to investigate torture and ill-treatment of prisoners.

Conditions in Zambian prisons are notoriously poor. According to official statistics, prisons designed to hold 6,500 prisoners now hold over 12,000. This severe overcrowding, combined with poor sanitation, inadequate medical facilities, meagre food supplies, and lack of potable water resulted in serious

outbreaks of dysentery and other diseases. The Human Rights Commission found prisoners being denied basic necessities such as soap and clothing, being fed food unfit for human consumption and being denied medical treatment.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Fred M'membe and Bright Mwape, whom Amnesty International believes are prisoners of conscience imprisoned solely for expressing critical opinions of the government;
- expressing concern about reports of the threats to the physical safety of Fred M'membe and Bright Mwape, and asking for assurances that they will not be subjected to any form of ill-treatment while in custody.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) President

His Excellency Frederick Chiluba  
President of the Republic of Zambia  
State House  
Independence Avenue  
PO Box 30208  
Lusaka, Zambia

**Faxes: +260-1 221939**

**E-mail: state@zamnet.zm**

**Telegrams: President Chiluba, Lusaka, Zambia**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

2) Vice President

Hon. Brig. Gen. G. Miyanda  
Vice President and Leader of the National Assembly  
State House  
PO Box 30208  
Lusaka, Zambia

**Faxes: +260 1 221939**

**E-mail: state@zamnet.zm**

**Telegrams: Vice President, Lusaka, Zambia**

**Salutation: Dear Vice President**

3) Head of Zambian prisons

Mr Elijah CHIMFUMPA  
Commissioner of Prisons  
Prison Service Headquarters  
PO Box 30133  
Lusaka, Zambia

**Faxes: +260-1 235222 (mark for attention of Prison Service Headquarters)**

**Telegrams: Head of Prisons, Prison Service HQ, Lusaka, Zambia**

**Salutation: Dear Mr Chimfumba**

4) Speaker of National Assembly

Dr Robinson Nabulyato  
National Assembly of Zambia  
PO Box 31299  
Lusaka, Zambia

**Faxes: +260 1 292252**

**Telegrams: Speaker Nabulyato, National Assembly, Lusaka, Zambia**

**Salutation: Dear Dr Nabulyato**

**COPIES TO:**

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President  
Law Association of Zambia  
P.O. Box 35271  
Lusaka, Zambia  
**Faxes: +260-1 223383/228497**  
**E-mail: zamlaw@zamnet.zm**

and to diplomatic representatives of Zambia accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your Section office, if sending appeals after 5 May 1996.**