

AI Index: NWS 11/44/93

Distr: SC/PO

No. of words: 1487

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TO: PRESS OFFICERS

FROM: PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS

DATE: 10 MAY 1993

WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 44/93

Contained in this weekly update is an external item on Malawi.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Indigenous People - 12 May

News release planned to accompany Focus article on Human rights violations against indigenous people worldwide has been sent out. Indigenous people will be one of the main themes of our work on the World Conference.

Guatemala - 19 May

Document or publication with a news release on a full range of recent human rights violations (in the past year or so) in Guatemala. Unfortunately, the document is running behind schedule and will not be in the Weekly Mailing from the IS until 12 May, one week before the embargo. Please get in touch with the IS if you need a copy earlier. The news release has been sent to you.

Egypt - 26 May

Document or publication and news release on all our concerns in Egypt. These include very high numbers of prisoners and torture.

UN World Conference - 2 June

News release on UN World Conference to go with June Focus article. More info soon.

UN WORLD CONFERENCE-RELATED NEWS INITIATIVES ONLY THROUGHOUT JUNE

Annual Report - 8 July

Annual Report publication, Worldwide Summary, Regional Summaries, Regional Updates, news release.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Malawi - 18 May(New Information)

Please note the embargo date has been changed back to 18 May.
Document on human rights violations and the referendum and weekly update item, enclosed in this document, to go with it. It will be sent to international media by the IS Press Office.

Azerbaijan - 28 May

Document on hostage-taking and weekly update item to go with section-level action. IS Press Office will send out to selected international media.

Unconfirmed news initiatives

News releases or embargoed weekly update items are being considered on the following subjects:
Aceh, Indonesia (14 July)

World Conference: Video Material

A video setting out our agenda for the World Conference is currently in production. It will be a development from the conventional ENR format and will be available in four languages. It will be distributed to sections and embargoed for 2 June.

Video compilation tapes are also in preparation for use at the time of the World Conference. One will include footage of human rights violations to illustrate the challenge to governments; another will focus on AI's own work. These tapes will be edited on 4 June and will be embargoed for 14 June.

Section Initiatives

French Section - European Press Officers' Meeting

This year's European Press Officer's meeting takes place at the French Section offices: 4 rue de la Pierre Levee, 75011 Paris, France.

The Hotel is: Hotel Du Grand Prieuré, 20 rue du grand Prieuré, 75011 Paris. Tel: +33 1 4700 7414.

Underground station: Oberkampf. Anyone who has not received the agenda should call Josette or Luisa at the French Section press office.

The following people will be attending:

Special guests: Pierre Sané, AI Secretary General; Jean Freedberg, Head of Communications, AI USA.

IS: Anita Tiessen; Anna Stuttard; Paula Seager; Adam Lloyd; John Darcy.

European Sections:

Austria:Géral Kador

Belgium:Philippe Hensmans & Luc Henkinbrant

Denmark:Lars Christensen

Germany:Gunnar Köhne

Italy:Riccardo Noury & Barbara Capponi

Netherlands:Maud Bredero & Janneke Tigchelaar

Norway:Stig Michaelson

Portugal:José Manuel Cabral

Sweden:Louisa Stannow

UK:Daphne Davies & Brian Dooley

European World Conference Press Briefing in June

The British Section Press Office has been talking to the EC project office and the Francophone Belgium Press Officer about holding a European press briefing in Brussels for MEPs and for journalists who will be covering the World Conference. The date will probably be Tuesday, June 8th in the morning. The aim will be to look at the EC's role as a whole in terms of its internal shortcomings (Asylum issues, etc), external

policies - aid/development, etc, and also to look at Europe's role within the UN.

Although the idea has been suggested by the British Section, it is hoped that all European Section Press Officers will be interested in being involved. For further information please contact either Daphne Davies, in the British Section Press Office or Johannes in the EC project office.

Weekly Update NWS 11/44/93

2. AFR 36/WU 04/93 EXTERNAL
EMBARGOED FOR 18 MAY 1993

MALAWI: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THREATEN REFERENDUM

Activists campaigning for a vote for multi-party democracy in next month's referendum in Malawi face physical attacks, death threats, arrest and prosecution, Amnesty International said today.

People in Malawi, Africa's last formal one-party state, vote on 14 June 1993 in a referendum which will decide whether to retain the existing system or change to multi-party rule. The government of the Malawi Congress Party, led by Life-President Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, has been in power for 29 years, sustained by systematic abuse of human rights, including long-term detention without trial, torture and political killings.

In a report published today, Amnesty International concludes that regulations which appear to protect free speech for those taking part in the referendum campaign are deeply flawed and ineffective, and that those who do speak out for multi-party democracy are likely to face human rights violations. Unless the government takes urgent steps to guarantee basic human rights, the referendum cannot be considered fair.

Amnesty International has documented serious human rights violations in Malawi for many years and as a result has been repeatedly refused access to the country. The last Amnesty International delegate to visit the country was expelled in 1983. In recent months Amnesty International has been refused permission to attend the trial of trade unionist Chakufwa Chihana, a prisoner of conscience serving a nine-month prison sentence with hard labour for possession of documents advocating multi-party democracy. This month the Malawian authorities told Amnesty International again that it could not visit the country.

Under international pressure, the Malawian Government last year declared some reforms, including a minor amendment to the law permitting indefinite administrative detention without trial, reducing the penalty for "sedition", allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit prisons and releasing most remaining political detainees.

Among the political prisoners subsequently released was Vera Chirwa, a lawyer and Africa's longest-serving known prisoner of conscience, imprisoned since 1981 and serving a life sentence after a trial which was grossly unfair. Her husband Orton Chirwa, a former Attorney General held in the same prison but not allowed to see her for eight years, died in prison in circumstances which are still unexplained just three months before her release. Amnesty International has received evidence that three men remain in administrative detention at Zomba Central Prison who have been held since the 1960s. They are Nelson Mtambo, Sidney Songo and Ntwana Mlombwa.

Amnesty International has welcomed the Malawian Government's first steps to improve protection for human rights but argues in its latest report that they remain essentially cosmetic. For example, the Referendum Regulations promulgated in February 1993 apparently give immunity from prosecution to those engaged in the referendum campaign. However, these have proved ineffective in practice and supporters of the multi-party "pressure groups" - which are not allowed to become political parties - are often arrested for distributing pro-democracy literature, selling membership cards or wearing T-shirts bearing political messages. They are charged with offences such as "vagabondage" or breach of the peace. The regulations require that police permission must be obtained for all public campaigning. In practice this means that multi-party campaigners place themselves outside the law simply by canvassing support. Meanwhile, in April parliament gave ruling party members blanket immunity from civil and criminal liability.

Malawian exiles returning to the country to take part in the campaign have been arrested at the airport. Prominent members of the multi-party campaign receive constant threats of violence. The Reverend Emmanuel Chinkwita Phiri, chairman of the multi-party umbrella group, the Public Affairs Committee, was nearly killed in an apparent hit-and-run attack by an unknown driver in January 1993. Earlier he was twice the victim of what appeared to be poison attacks in which his clothes were impregnated with organo-phosphates.

Said Amnesty International: "This referendum is a unique opportunity for the Malawi people to vote about their own human rights. Malawians go to polls to decide between old and new political systems on the same day the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights opens. Surely now is the time for the government of Malawi to listen to the voice of the international community, correct its appalling human rights record and lay the ground for firm protection of human rights for the future."

Amnesty International is calling on the Malawian government to take urgent steps to protect the rights of all those taking part in the referendum campaign, including releasing Chakufwa Chihana and other prisoners of conscience and withdrawing criminal charges against non-violent critics of the government. Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the safety of multi-party campaigners in the aftermath of the referendum, when international observers will have left the country.