



## **AFRICA/MALAWI - Possible arson destroys Malawi's Bishops' headquarters**

Lilongwe (Agenzia Fides) – An arsonist may have started a fire that destroyed the offices of the Malawi Catholic bishops' Conference, in the capital Lilongwe. A source provided reports to "Aid to the Church in Need", sent to Fides. On 9 October a fire broke out at the headquarters of the Bishops' Conference in Malawi, destroying bishops' offices and priests living quarters. "A report sent to Aid to the Church in Need from a source in Malawi says that the destruction of the Bishops' Conference offices was part of an ongoing firebombing campaign against government critics", said the statement.

In an interview on 12 October with ACN, Fr. George Buleya, Secretary General of the Bishops' Conference said he was unable to confirm the reports but he said arson could not be excluded. Fr. Buleya stated that the fire broke out in a priest's apartment and then spread to the offices.

The fire at the bishops' offices follows the early September firebombing of the offices of the Institute for Policy Interaction. The institute's head is Rafik Hajat, is one of the most outspoken critics of Malawi president Bingu wa Mutharika.

His Exc Mgr. Joseph Mukasa Zuza, Bishop of Mzuzu and President of the Malawi bishops' Conference, has repeatedly criticized the Head of state for his undemocratic behavior and for his economic policy that has reduced the country to a collapse. In particular, on Aug. 16, during a prayer meeting for peace in Malawi sponsored by the major religions of Malawi, Mgr. Zuza had said that the Presidency "must stop silencing civil society, the media, the judiciary system and democracy which the Country has paid a high price for" (see Fides 18/08/2011). (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 14/10/2011)