News

Candid photo of Saulos Chilima wearing blue shit outdoors.

Malawi's Vice President Saulos Klaus Chilima arrives at a polling station in Lilongwe, Malawi, May 21, 2019, in this still image obtained from Reuters TV video. Chilima, a Catholic, died June 11, 2024, along with nine others, in a plane crash in the Chikangawa Forest in the north of the country. (OSV News/Eldson Chagara, Reuters)

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LILONGWE, Malawi — June 12, 2024

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Catholic bishops in Malawi mourned the loss of the country's vice president, a devout Catholic, who died June 10 in a tragic plane crash.

Saulos Chilima, 51, died alongside nine others, including the former first lady Shanil Dzimbiri, aboard a military aircraft.

The search and rescue teams found the destroyed wreckage of the plane June 11, near a hill in the Chikangawa Forest in the north of the country, a day after it went missing.

"The Catholic Bishops of Malawi have learnt with great shock and deep sorrow about the tragic plane crash that claimed the precious lives of … the Vice President … and

nine other Malawians," said Archbishop George Desmond Tambala of Lilongwe, president of the Malawi bishops' conference, in a statement received by OSV News June 12.

"At their death, our hearts are torn, wounded and the nation mourns … May the almighty God grant strength to their families as we mourn them," Tambala wrote.

The bishops expressed their condolences to the president of Malawi, the families of those lost and the country.

Chilima was flying to attend a funeral of a former justice minister, but his plane could not land at Mzuzu Airport — about 223 miles north of the capital, Lilongwe — as scheduled due to bad weather. Aviation authorities then ordered the aircraft to return to Lilongwe, but moments later it went off the radar.

Tambala said Chilima and his wife were practicing and dedicated Catholics, and hailed from families built and grounded on the Catholic faith, ethos and values.

The archbishop called on Catholic churches across the country to pray for "the restful repose" of the souls of the vice president and other victims of the crash at Sunday Masses on June 16.

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Born in 1973, Chilima was married to Mary Nkamanyanchi Chilima and the couple had two children.

He was first sworn in as vice president in 2014 and for the second time in 2020. He was an economist and computer science specialist.

Father Andrew Kaufa, a Malawian priest who coordinates the social communication department of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa, said Chilima's Catholic faith was unquestionable.

"He was a Catholic politician whose faith had an unquestionable impact on his values, servant style of leadership, and the manifesto of his political party bordered on the common good," Kaufa, a Montfort missionary priest, told OSV News.

President Lazarus Chakwera June 11 declared a 21-day mourning, during which flags will fly half-staff mast.

Earlier, Chakwera had described his deputy's death as "heart-breaking" and "painful," while paying tribute to his performance.

He said Chilima "was a good man, a devoted father and husband, a patriotic citizen who served his country with distinction."

"I consider it one of the greatest honors of my life to have had him as my deputy and counselor for the past four years," the president of Malawi said.