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Nigeria: Local government elections -- no lessons learned

Amnesty International is urging the governors of the 36 Nigerian states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, to ensure that the protection of human rights is the top priority before, during and after the local government elections, held across the country during November and December 2007.

Political violence has already been reported in several states. The worst incidents occurred in Kano State, where six people were confirmed dead by the police. Supporters of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Nigeria People's Party clashed over the results of the polls held on 17 November. Amnesty International received reports suggesting that up to 20 people may have been killed in several areas throughout Kano state. As a result of the incidents the federal government deployed the army in Kano State. In Kwara State, a journalist who witnessed voting irregularities was attacked by political supporters. In Benin State, a member of the PDP allegedly received death threats from political opponents.

In the run-up to general and parliamentary elections in May 2007, Amnesty International publicly called on Nigerian politicians to protect human rights and to refrain from using violence before, during and after the elections. Despite warnings by Nigerian and international civil society, the elections of May 2007 resulted in the killing of 200 people. Among those killed were candidates running for political office like PDP prospective candidate for Governor of Lagos State, Chief Funsho Williams and PDP prospective candidate for Governor of Ekiti State, Dr Ayo Daramola. The election period also saw attacks on journalists, intimidation and harassment of voters, and widespread destruction of property. Electoral campaigning was characterised by the use of armed gangs by politicians to engage in political violence and related human rights abuses. Six months later, nothing seems to have been learned from the May 2007 experience. The recurrence of these human rights abuses is the result of the failure of the authorities to take preventive steps, including bringing to justice those responsible for the political violence. This failure perpetuates impunity, and leads perpetrators to commit further human rights abuses in the belief that they will not be held accountable.

With local government elections in the next few weeks in different states, Amnesty International is concerned that the number of victims of political violence will increase. Amnesty International calls on all the state governors and all local government authorities to:

- unequivocally commit themselves to the protection of human rights before, during and after the local government polls;
- publicly renounce support for armed gangs.

Amnesty International further calls on State governors to:

- investigate all human rights abuses by politicians and their supporters;
- bring to justice those responsible for human rights abuses.