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KENYA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION MEETS WITH GOVERNMENT

A high-level Amnesty International delegation led by Secretary General Pierre Sané today met with members of the Kenyan government led by Vice President George Saitoti and urged the government to live up to commitments to improve the country's human rights record.

The delegation from the world-wide human rights organization raised concerns with various representatives of the government including torture, deaths in suspicious circumstances, the use of the excessive force by the police and prison conditions. These concerns were included in a memorandum sent to the government last month.

"We appreciate the opportunity to enter into dialogue with the government about our human rights concerns in Kenya," Mr Sané said. "During the meeting the Vice President made public commitments to address our concerns and we will be closely monitoring how these commitments are implemented."

"We look forward to continuing dialogue with the government and hope that the government's commitments to respect international standards on human rights will be translated into action to improve the fundamental rights of all Kenyans."

At the meeting, the Vice President committed the government to investigating all cases of torture and to bringing those found responsible to justice. He assured the delegation that police brutality and the unlawful use of force is not tolerated and in the case of unlawful killings, police officers will be prosecuted.

Mr Sané rejected arguments about national sovereignty put forward by the Vice President saying that "both the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations have recognized that human rights do not fall solely within the domain of national sovereignty. The Kenyan people are entitled to the same basic rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as any other citizen of the world. By ratifying international standards such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights the Kenyan government has acknowledged that it is the responsibility of the international community to scrutinize, monitor and demand that the government lives up to its obligations".

Those present at the meeting also included the Attorney General, the Solicitor General, the Commissioner of Prisons, the Commissioner of Police, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education and Secretary General of KANU, the Director of the CID and the Permanent Secretaries of the President and Ministry of Health. The Amnesty International delegation is due to have follow-up meetings with the Attorney General and Commissioner of Prisons to concentrate on specific areas such as legal reform and the human rights record of the Kenyan Police.

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