

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 32/029/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 241
23 December 2002

Kenya: Tension rises in advance of polls as all sides are involved in political violence

Four days before Kenyans go to the polls, an Amnesty International mission in the country reports widespread tension and intimidation as well as violent incidents involving supporters of all the main parties. The mission is monitoring the human rights situation in Kenya over the election period.

"Violence is not concentrated on any one party, with attacks being suffered by candidates and supporters on all sides. An assortment of weapons has been used in attacks, including sticks, stones, a sword and in an instance in Mount Elgon, a pistol and two automatic assault rifles. Arson attacks have resulted in loss of life and property," Amnesty International said.

Even though the build-up to this year's election has been less violent than in the two previous multiparty elections, violence is widespread.

On 11 December 2002 in the Langata constituency of Nairobi, approximately 200 women awaiting address by a Kenya African National Union (KANU) candidate were violently assaulted and dispersed by a gang of youths from the opposition. On 18 December campaigners for opposition National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) were injured when they were pelted with stones allegedly by KANU supporters in Ziwa location in Wasin'gishu District. Five were treated in Eldoret Teaching and Referral Hospital.

On the 8 December 2002, 24 homes were burnt in Kwanza along the border of Trans Nzoia and West Pokot. In Nairobi province, an attack by the Mungiki militia on Karia village in the Githunguri constituency left at least two people dead, with many more fleeing their homes. A hut was set alight in Mumias, Eldoret on the night of 16 December, with the resultant death of a family of three. An arson attack on two houses of a KANU civic candidate in Nyeri District left seven family members dead.

"In this atmosphere of intimidation and violence, which in some cases has led to the displacement of people, some sections of the population may not be able to exercise their freedom of expression and participation in political life on polling day," Amnesty International added.

"Furthermore, while we welcome the more active role taken by the Electoral Commission of Kenya in taking action against candidates and parties involved in election violence, it is no substitute for a proper police investigation and the prosecution of those responsible. Although in some areas the police have taken action and arrested suspected perpetrators, this needs to happen more systematically in all parts of the country," Amnesty International urged.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>