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## **Kenya: Government Promises Ring Hollow**

**NAIROBI** -- The international community, businesses and donors should redouble their efforts to improve human rights in Kenya as the government's record worsens in the run up to elections later this year, Amnesty International said today as it launched a new campaign against human rights abuses in the East African state.

The organization accused the Kenyan government of failing to live up to promises to improve its human rights record, and warned that unless urgent steps are taken, the country would lose its position as a stable environment for investment and development in the region.

"The human rights situation for ordinary Kenyans is becoming worse on a daily basis, as the clamour for long-overdue reforms gets louder," Amnesty International said. "Recent violence and killings on the coast point towards the pressure reaching boiling point. The government continues to violate international human rights treaties whenever it sees fit, while at the same time trying to deflect attention by promising reforms at some point in the future."

"The current violence is not just related to upcoming elections, but the result of continued attacks on opposition groups, human rights activists and non-governmental organizations over the last few years. Influential governments, the donor community in Kenya and investors must hold the Kenyan government accountable for its actions now, before the situation deteriorates any further."

According to Amnesty International's report, police brutality is commonplace throughout the country. Despite criticism of the police's impartiality, investigations of these human rights violations remain their responsibility rather than an independent body's, and as a result the victims and their families are being denied justice.

In July, the government announced it would introduce legal reforms and set up a commission to look into constitutional reform, but that this commission will have up to three years to report its findings. The previous task forces set up to investigate legal reforms and human rights violations have yet to report any findings three years later, so it is difficult to have any confidence that the government is conducting anything else than a "wholly cosmetic exercise for the benefit of the donor community," Amnesty International concludes.

During a June 1997 visit to Kenya, an Amnesty International delegation called for legal reforms to prevent further bloodshed. A few weeks later, the government's intransigence led to 13 deaths as police violently dispersed peaceful demonstrators led by local clergymen. In August, political violence in the coastal region led to around 47 deaths. The August events mirrored similar violence during the previous elections and in which the government was implicated.

Amnesty International is calling on the Kenyan government to implement promptly comprehensive reforms to key laws which violate international human rights standards -- particularly those which restrict freedom of association and expression -- such as the Preservation of Public Security Act, which the government has stated will only be reviewed when the constitution is revised.

According to Amnesty International, the amendments proposed by the government do not go far enough. For example, the amendments to the Public Order Act would mean the police retaining wide discretionary powers to prevent public gatherings, while amendments to the Penal Code would still allow the government to criminalize peaceful opposition activities.

Amnesty International is also calling on governments to ensure that election monitors deployed in Kenya include a strong human rights component in their work, and that these monitors should raise cases of human rights violations publicly with the government. Investors and donors in Kenya should also raise these cases with the government.

Concerted pressure on the Kenyan government has worked before -- when President Moi was forced to concede multi-party elections in 1992, Amnesty International said, adding that the signs are there that sustained pressure could bring about the legal reforms needed to increase human rights protection.

Among the cases raised in Amnesty International's report is that of Solomon Muruli, a student leader at the University of Nairobi who was killed in February 1997 in suspicious circumstances after being accused of links with a political party. Rosemary Nyambura was arrested on 10 May 1992 and died on same day at Ruraka police station. Although an inquest was held and on 20 July 1995 the magistrate ruled that four police officers involved in the death should be charged for murder, to date no one has been arrested. Geoffrey Ndungu Gichuki was arrested in December 1994, tied to a tree and severely beaten. After six days being denied medical treatment, his arm developed gangrene and had to be amputated.

"The real fear is that these victims will not be the last unless the government is pressured to improve the human rights situation," Amnesty International said. "The international community has it within its power to bring about real change in Kenya -- change which will benefit the Kenyan people as well as investors, to ensure that Kenya remains a stable base for governments, corporations and international organizations."

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