

AI Index: PRE 01/451/2011
12 September 2011

Freedom for activist charged with Uganda bombing

The release of a Kenyan human rights activist held for a year in connection with a bomb attack in Uganda is long overdue, Amnesty International said today.

The charges against NGO director Al-Amin Kimathi and four other defendants were dropped today at the start of their trial.

Kimathi was arrested a year ago after he travelled to Uganda to observe the trial of six Kenyans charged in connection with the July bomb attacks in Kampala, which killed 76 people who were watching the 2010 World Cup final.

"It's a relief that Al-Amin Kimathi has been released, although it is long overdue," said Michelle Kagari, Amnesty International's Africa Deputy Programme director.

"The fact he was held for nearly a year without the authorities ever producing any specific evidence against him strongly suggests that the terrorism charges were simply a pretext to detain him for carrying out his human rights work."

Al-Amin Kimathi was detained, along with Kenyan lawyer Mbugua Mureithi, on 15 September 2010 after the two travelled to Uganda to observe the court hearing of six terror suspects.

Mureithi was released after three days and deported to Kenya. Kimathi, head of the Muslim Human Rights Forum, was held incommunicado for six days before being charged with terrorism and murder on 21 September.

He spent almost a year in pre-trial detention, during which time the Ugandan authorities refused to provide him or his lawyers with any evidence against him.

The trial of the 14 remaining defendants on charges in connection with the bombings will go ahead in Kampala.

Over the past year, the Ugandan government has denied entry to, and deported, several human rights activists and lawyers who travelled to Uganda to monitor the case against Al-Amin Kimathi.

Authorities also restricted the work of human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, in monitoring the treatment of Kimathi while in detention. Prison authorities refused to allow Amnesty International delegates access to Kimathi on four occasions.

The Muslim Human Rights Forum had challenged the legitimacy of the transfer to Uganda of several Kenyan suspects in the case.

"As it appears that no evidence has ever been, or will be, presented to justify Al-Amin Kimathi's

detention, the Ugandan authorities must ensure he has access to a prompt and effective remedy including compensation," said Michelle Kagari.