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Uganda: Only a climate of accountability will create lasting respect
for human rights

Amnesty International today called on President Yoweri Museveni and opposition political leaders in Uganda to re-affirm their commitment to human rights by publicly condemning any acts of violence committed by their supporters in the context of this week's Presidential elections.

"Reports of intimidation and harassment of supporters of different candidates during the election campaign have shown that human rights are still not fully respected in Uganda," Amnesty International said. "Dedication to the protection of human rights is now needed to make Uganda a country where human rights are protected not only by law, but also in practice."

The Presidential elections in Uganda have been marred by allegations of human rights abuses, both before and after the elections on 12 March 2001. An increasing number of human rights violations against opposition supporters, including illegal arrests and detention without charge, ill-treatment in detention, and alleged unlawful killings were reported by the Ugandan press in the weeks leading up to the elections. In some instances, supporters of President Museveni were also targeted.

After at least one person was killed when members of the Presidential Protection Unit opened fire on demonstrators in Rukungiri, south-west Uganda, on 3 March 2001, both international observers and Ugandan human rights groups expressed concern at the role played by the Ugandan army in a newly created 'task force on internal security'. The task force had been established by the government in response to the increasing level of violence in the run-up to the elections. Although the day of the election passed relatively peacefully, some violence continued beyond election day when on 14 March a bomb explosion in Kampala killed two people and severely injured several others.

Amnesty International believes that only prompt, impartial and independent investigations into all allegations of human rights violations committed in the context of the election campaign will create a climate in which no further abuses are committed. The results of such investigations should be made public, and alleged perpetrators brought to justice in trials that conform with international standards for fair trials. "Every Ugandan has the right to life; the right to be free from torture; and the right to peacefully express his or her political opinion," Amnesty International said. "Respect for human rights is central to Uganda's political, economic and social development. All those interested in a better future for Uganda should speak up now for human rights and accountability."

Background

On 14 March 2001, the chairman of Uganda's Electoral Commission declared incumbent President, Yoweri Museveni, the winner of Presidential elections held in Uganda on 12 March 2001. President Museveni won 69.3% of the vote with his main challenger, Colonel (retired) Kizza Besigye coming second with 27.8% in an election that saw an overall turnout of 70.3%. The results have been challenged by the opposition who allege widespread intimidation of their supporters and vote-rigging.

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