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KENYA: VIOLENT BREAK-UP OF PEACEFUL RALLY

Amnesty International expressed grave concern at the use of excessive force by Kenyan security force personnel in breaking up a rally in Uhuru Park, Nairobi, earlier today, and called for the authorities to exercise restraint in dealing with any future rallies.

Several thousand people were peacefully being led in prayers by Bishop Njoya in the park when police and paramilitary forces fired teargas into the crowd without warning and violently dispersed those gathered. During subsequent disturbances in central Nairobi, police and General Services Unit (GSU) personnel arbitrarily beat bystanders as well as those involved in demonstrations and looting.

“The teargassing and beatings meted out to peaceful protesters was unwarranted and excessive, particularly since the law under which the government declared the meeting illegal contravenes international human rights standards which Kenya has ratified,” said an Amnesty spokesperson.

A high level Amnesty International delegation, led by Secretary General Pierre Sané, is due to arrive in the country on Sunday to launch its Human Rights Manifesto for Kenya, and meet with representatives of the government, political parties, non-governmental organizations and religious leaders.

The manifesto sets out reforms essential to improving human rights, including the repeal of legislation such as the Public Order Act, which was invoked by the authorities to prevent the meeting taking place, and calls on the government to bring Kenyan legislation into line with international standards.

“Kenya has ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which protect the right to freedom of association denied today,” the spokesperson added. “This latest incident shows the importance of the reforms outlined in our manifesto in ensuring that the fundamental rights of all Kenyans are protected in the future.”

“The authorities should set up a prompt and impartial investigation into today’s events, ensure that those responsible for using excessive force are brought to justice, and that the security forces follow international guidelines when dealing with future rallies.”

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Members of the delegation will be available for interview in English, French and Arabic throughout the visit. Mr Sané will be holding a press conference on:

11 June 1997 -- 10.00am

Nairobi Hilton Hotel -- Amboseli conference room

For further information, to arrange an interview, or to obtain copies of a media pack, call: Mark Ogle, Press Officer: Hilton Hotel, Nairobi (Room 1201) Tel.: (254) 2 334 000 Fax.: (254) 2 339 462/226 477/219611, Mobile phone: (254) (0) 71374106