
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 76/94

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 14 APRIL 1994

NO OF WORDS: 549

AI INDEX: NWS 11/76/94
DISTR: SC/PO

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - KENYA

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Hong Kong - 0600 hrs gmt, 21 April - SEE NEWS SERVICES 71/94 AND 36/94

Trade Unionists - 29 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 62

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - SEE NEWS SERVICE 62

Burundi - 16 May - SEE NEWS SERVICES 53/94 and 36/94

China - 1 June - More details to follow

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Switzerland CAT - 19 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 53/94

Israel & OT CAT - 25 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 53/94

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Annual Report - 7 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

AI INDEX: AFR 32/WU 01/94
14 APRIL 1994

KENYA: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST ON TRIAL FOR HIS LIFE

Koigi wa Wamwere, a prominent human rights activist, a former member of parliament and a three-time former political prisoner, is on trial in Kenya for attempted robbery with violence along with three other defendants. If convicted, they face mandatory death sentences.

Their trial began on 12 April in Nakuru Magistrate's Court, 200 kilometres northwest of Nairobi, after they had been held for five months on remand. All four are known political activists. At the time of his arrest last November Koigi wa Wamwere was on bail for sedition and other charges. One of the four, farmer and councillor Godfrey Ngengi Njuguna, is in hospital with kidney problems and swelling in the lower limbs and is travelling to court daily from hospital.

Their arrest and trial appears to be part of a pattern of harassment of human rights activists, opposition figures and journalists, and especially those who - like Koigi wa Wamwere - are attempting to investigate or report incidents of political violence in the Rift Valley and other parts of Western Kenya. Recently five journalists have been charged with subversion for reporting on the political violence. Government involvement has been alleged in the ethnic-based violence which has killed around 1,500 people and displaced more than 300,000 since it began in May 1991.

Amnesty International believes that the charges against Koigi wa Wamwere and his co-defendants may have been fabricated and that they are probably prisoners of conscience. In the past, the Kenyan police have frequently charged peaceful government critics with political offenses. In a major sedition trial in 1991, fabricated prosecution evidence was used to convict prisoners of conscience in an unfair trial. In addition, because those charged with attempted robbery with violence cannot be released on bail, there is concern that the police are making abusive use of non-bailable charges to arbitrarily detain non-violent critics of the government. Amnesty International is also concerned that these four prisoners face the death penalty if convicted. The organization opposes the death penalty under all circumstances as cruel and inhuman treatment.

Koigi wa Wamwere and two of his co-defendants - James Maigwa and Charles Kuria Wamwere (both relatives of his) - are currently held in Nakuru prison where there is severe overcrowding, diet is poor and prisoners have frequently been denied adequate medical treatment. Charles Kuria Wamwere suffered from typhoid while in prison. Amnesty International is concerned about their treatment in prison, state of health and fitness to stand trial.

Kenyan lawyers and human rights activists have appealed for international observers to attend the trial and Amnesty International is sending a trial observer in order to assess whether the trial is in accordance with international standards.

ENDS\