

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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The African Commission: Amnesty International's oral statement on the human rights situation in Africa

Nigeria (Human rights violations in the run-up to elections)

In April 2007 Nigeria will hold presidential, parliamentary and state gubernatorial elections. Amnesty International is concerned by the already high levels of violence and intimidation that surround the electoral process, and by the potential for further serious violations of human rights in the context of the election process between now and April 2007.

Amnesty International documented widespread political violence before, during and after elections in Nigeria in 1999 and 2003. This included several political murders as well as assaults and faction fighting between armed militia groups linked to electoral candidates. Political violence occurred at the national, state and local levels.

Amnesty International has already received numerous reports of cases of political violence linked to the 2007 elections, including the assassinations or attempted assassinations of several candidates.

Allegations are rife across Nigeria of groups of civilians being armed by political leaders to foment political violence at the local and state levels. The threat of armed violence is fuelled by the increasing flow of firearms into Nigeria. Amnesty International is particularly concerned by political violence taking place at the local level which we believe is under-reported.

Underlying the election-related violence are serious issues related to governance and access to resources in Nigeria and a culture of impunity whereby senior political figures who are alleged to sponsor violence are frequently not investigated, let alone brought to justice. Despite recent statements by some security officials and occasional arrests, the majority of election-related violence goes uninvestigated and unpunished. Impunity for similar crimes and human rights violations during previous elections has a direct bearing on the present situation and the potential for the security situation in Nigeria to deteriorate further as April 2007 approaches.

Amnesty International's role in elections is not to act as an election observer, either in Nigeria or elsewhere. The organization confines itself to research and comment on human rights abuses that occur in the context of elections and call on for the respect and protection of human rights. It is strictly neutral on any election contest, with no favoured party or candidates. It does not comment on election procedures and technicalities.

Amnesty International believes that the African Commission can play a crucial role in ensuring the respect and protection of human rights in Nigeria. For this reason, we are encouraging the Commission to:

call on the government of Nigeria to ensure the full respect and protection of the human rights enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and call on all political parties to publicly state that human rights abuses in the election context will not be tolerated;
call on the relevant authorities to investigate all allegations of human rights abuses and, if there is sufficient admissible evidence, to prosecute the suspected perpetrators;
call for the government to respect and protect the work of human rights defenders, including those advocating for the human rights of women, and ensure they can carry out their activities in promoting and monitoring the respect of human rights during the elections.

Amnesty International would like to encourage the African Commission to carry out a promotional visit in Nigeria prior to the April 2007 elections, with a view of promoting the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and encouraging the relevant authorities and all political parties to publicly commit to a clear program of protection and respect of human rights during and after the elections.

Sudan (Darfur)

Survival is still difficult and dangerous for the displaced persons of Darfur. The same government which funded, supported and participated with the Janjawid militias to drive them out of their villages and lands, now refuses to allow the transition from an the current African Union peacekeeping force (AMIS) to a larger and better-equipped United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur which has been mandated by the UN Security Council to protect civilians. The very government whose obligation should be to protect its people is denying protection to its own people.

Meanwhile the people suffer. More than 2,000 villages in Darfur have been destroyed since 2003. Nearly two million people are confined to camps, tens of thousands more shelter in towns, and 200,000 are still in refugee camps in Chad. In most of West Darfur the Janjawid occupy the land and the displaced people are unable to leave the camps for internal displaced or the towns without risking being tortured, raped or killed by the Janjawid. Amnesty International, which has not been allowed access to Sudan, gathered scores of testimonies in Chad from those who had recently fled Darfur who described killing and torture from the Janjawid. The Sudanese police take no effective action to investigate complaints of Janjawid abuses, and in some cases those who complained to the Sudanese police were detained and tortured.

The government of Sudan, after several AU-brokered agreements since 2004, has failed to take any effective steps to disarm the Janjawid. Worse, Janjawid are now not only being incorporated into paramilitary organizations like the Popular Defence Forces or the Border Intelligence, but also reportedly into the regular army. Instead of being disarmed, they are being rearmed. For instance, observers, including the victims of the attacks in Jebel Moon, described Janjawid who attacked them being armed with brand new weapons, and wearing brand new Sudanese army uniform. Observers in the Sudanese Armed Forces Camp in Tina, on the Chad border about 80 kilometers from the Jebel Moon, have also described Janjawid with new arms and uniforms within the camp. Villages have been attacked a few kilometers from a Sudanese armed forces camp, without any attempt by the Sudanese forces to protect the inhabitants. At the same time, the Sudanese armed forces have carried out indiscriminate and sometimes, reportedly, targeted attacks on civilians, by bombing civilian villages.

The AMIS forces which were so welcomed when they were first deployed are now facing mistrust by the internally displaced persons in Darfur. They lack adequate funding and essential equipment, such as means of transport, communication facilities often as a result of unkept promises from donors. The Sudanese government limits their movements, imposing a curfew and demanding prior flight authorization. This makes any rapid response to attacks on civilians difficult, and nourishes distrust and helplessness among the people.

In March 2006, the AU Peace and Security Council supported a transition to a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. On 31 August 2005, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution inviting the government of Sudan

to consent to the deployment of UN peacekeepers in Darfur, with a mandate and means to effectively protect civilians. There are already more than 10,000 UN peacekeepers in the South as part of UNMIS. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement, the partner of the National Congress Party in the Government of National Unity supports the transition to UN troops. So do all opposition parties in Sudan except the ruling NCP.

Without a government to protect them, the displaced people of Darfur must look for regional and international organizations to help them: the African Union and the United Nations. At the 38th Ordinary Session, the African Commission adopted a very important resolution calling on the government of Sudan to comply with its obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Amnesty International believes that the African Commission should continue to exert its authority by urging the government of Sudan to ensure the effective protection of civilians in Darfur and consent to the deployment to a UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur, pursuant to UN Security Council resolution 1706.