

AI INDEX: AFR 32/37/97
8 JULY 1997

Kenya: Violent security force crackdown aims to intimidate pro-democracy activists

Amnesty International was appalled at the violence meted out by police and security forces as they broke up pro-democracy rallies organized throughout Kenya yesterday which resulted in the death a 17-year-old boy and nine others, and left scores of people injured.

"Excessive violence was clearly used in an attempt to intimidate pro-democracy activists from holding further rallies," Amnesty International said today. "The authorities should set up a prompt and impartial investigation into yesterday'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."

This is the third such event that has been violently disrupted by the security forces in the last two months as the demand for minimal constitutional and legal reform increases, in the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections due later this year. The government has promised a constitutional review after the election, arguing that for practical reasons reform is not possible until then. However, many Kenyans believe the elections will be meaningless without reform.

"That reforms are needed -- both to the constitution and to a number of laws -- is agreed by all sides. It is the timing that is in question. However, unless all sides agree to meet and find a way to resolve the situation the violence and lack of respect for human rights will increase and more lives will be lost," Amnesty International said.

Further demonstrations are planned and there are calls now for comprehensive constitutional and legal reform as too many lives have been lost.

"Less than a month ago, during a visit by the organization's Secretary General to Kenya, we warned the international community that unless there was a serious attempt to resolve the situation the violence would escalate," Amnesty International said.

"We reiterate our call for all those involved to urgently engage in meaningful dialogue to ensure that everyone is granted the freedom to organize and protest. We believe that the international community has a key role to play in helping persuade the different parties to meet and engage in discussions in order to prevent further human rights violations."

ENDS\