

AI Index: AFR 32/53/97  
October 1997

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT GIVEN AT THE  
LAUNCH OF THE KENYA PRIORITY ACTION,  
NAIROBI, KENYA ,10 SEPTEMBER 1997**

Dialogue is much talked about in Kenya today. The current negotiations between the government and the opposition parties in Kenya is keenly followed and we hope that they are successful and bring about real change to the laws in this country which currently operate to deny Kenyans their fundamental human rights, such as freedom of expression and association.

But, for dialogue to be meaningful it has to result not only in changes to bad laws, but to changes in practice. In March this year the Kenyan Government acceded to the United Nations Convention on Torture, yet people continue to be tortured in this country.

Our concerns are bigger than just legal and constitutional reforms, we are concerned with the gross human rights violations which happen in this country on a daily basis, such as police brutality, torture, deaths in custody, excessive use of lethal force, conditions in prisons and the death penalty.

On Sunday I spoke to two women who were arrested during the *Saba Saba* demonstrations in Kisumu. They were beaten by police - even though one of them told the police she was pregnant. They were locked up in an overcrowded police cell with over 200 people, most of them men, were they had to fight off advances from those men.

One man, who had been badly beaten before being brought to the cells, died that night. In the morning these two women were taken to court with other *Saba* people and charged in a group of 16. They were offered a choice of pleading guilty and a fine of Shs 6000 or three months imprisonment; or pleading not guilty and finding bail of Shs 6000 - 6000 they did not have. They pleaded guilty and were taken to Kodiaga Prison, where conditions are very harsh.

Many Kenyans have fled coastal areas which have been the scene of violence recently. They have fled not only because of fears of further violence, but also fearing the violent reactions of the police and General Service Unit.

There needs to be proper, independent investigations of what happened, to identify those responsible and bring them to justice. Not the intimidation of the local population and human rights groups and local monitors attempting to do just that.

Amnesty International is not just putting pressure on the Kenyan Government but also on other governments - specifically donors as well as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations, the EU and the Commonwealth. We believe they have a responsibility to improve human rights in Kenya.

When we came here in June we called for international human rights monitors - we continue to make that call. We believe that international human rights monitors are needed now to protect the rights of Kenyans, particularly vulnerable groups, such as women, by monitoring, documenting and reporting human rights violations, as and when they happen. They will also provide protection to local human rights monitors.

We are aware that when elections are held many people come to observe them. Together with these international monitors we are asking that all international monitors sent by governments or other organisations to monitor the election include a strong human rights component in their work and raise cases of human rights violations publicly with the government.

When we came in June we had discussions with the government and donors. We don't believe the response we received from the government is adequate. We believe the police force continues to act with relative impunity. This report details our discussions with the government and includes cases we have been raising over a number of years where there has been little or no action taken. Cases such as Rosemary Nyambura who was killed in Ruraka police station on 10 May 1992 several hours after her arrest. An inquest was held three years later in July 1995, the magistrate ruled that four police officers involved in her death should be charged with murder, to date no one has been arrested.

We are still waiting for the Kenyan Government and donor governments to act. The real fear is that these victims will not be the last unless the government is pressured to improve the human rights situation, by not only Kenyans but also other governments, specifically donors and the OAU. Together it is within their power to bring about real change - change which will benefit the people and stability of Kenya.

That is why we are mobilizing our, over 1 million, members from all over the world to campaign for a real improvement in human rights in Kenya.

/ENDS