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Kenya: Government's commitment to human rights reform doubtful as violence is used to break up pro-democracy rally

Yet again the Kenyan authorities have used violence to break up a peaceful pro-democracy rally today -- arresting opposition politicians and others -- despite statements by the government that the opposition would be free to hold public meetings, Amnesty International said today.

“While reform is being debated in parliament, Kenyans are being brutally prevented from freely expressing their opinion or from peacefully protesting,” the organization said. “This kind of action by the security forces calls into question the government's recent commitment to real human rights reform.”

Many people were reportedly hurt by armed riot police and plain clothed police officers who broke up the rally using teargas and beat people with whips and clubs. A number of people were arrested including Paul Muite, a leading opposition politician and member of Safina -- a political party recently refused registration. Four other opposition members of parliament and several human rights activists, including the Tirop Kitur, chairperson of the Release Political Prisoners group, were also said to have been arrested.

At the same time President Moi addressed a rally in Uhuru Park to celebrate Moi day -- a national holiday -- informing the crowd that “*Kenya is today moving forward towards a new political and economic order.*” The rally in Uhuru Park went ahead without any disruption.

The pro-democracy rally at Kamukunji park, Nairobi, was called by the National Convention Executive Council (NCEC) a group of human rights activists, religious leaders, opposition politicians and others, who are demanding comprehensive reforms prior to the election due later this year.

This is the fifth event organized by pro-democracy activists that has been violently disrupted by the security forces in the last five months. The government has promised a constitutional review after the election. The reform of some legislation, including the Public Order Act, is currently being debated in parliament after limited reforms were agreed between some opposition members of parliament and members of the ruling Kenya Africa National Union party.

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