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Nigerian politicians must stop election chaos

Nigerian political candidates must rein in their supporters to put a stop to continuing violence on the eve of national polls, Amnesty International said today.

“Words alone are not enough. Politicians must demonstrate that they are serious about putting an end to the clashes between supporters.” said Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Africa, Tawanda Hondora.

“The violence is causing immense damage to the country and its institutions. Politicians need to immediately take responsibility for their actions and rein in their supporters before the elections dissolve into chaos.”

“We receive consistent reports that politicians, both candidates and those in office, instigate political violence, despite their statements to the contrary.”

In the past two weeks at least 20 people have died in political attacks and clashes throughout the country. Many others have been injured and scores of cars and buildings burned.

In some of the worst violence so far, armed clashes and rioting by supporters of rival political parties killed at least six people on the 22 March in the southern state of Akwa Ibom, and resulted in the burning down of the PDP ruling party’s Presidential campaign office in the state capital Uyo.

The government is reported to have issued ‘shoot on sight’ orders, which are contrary to Nigerian law.

The police in Akwa Ibom state have carried out mass arrests, including of bystanders, according to local human rights groups. An opposition leader has been charged with treason, which carries a death sentence.

“Any order to ‘shoot on sight’ is a violation of Nigeria’s constitution and the country’s international human rights obligations” said Tawanda Hondora.

“The call for security forces to use this level of force is a deeply troubling sign, a situation made worse by the irresponsible behaviour of political parties.” added Tawanda Hondora.

Other violent clashes have taken place throughout the country, including in southwestern Ekiti State, Jigawa State and Bauchi State in the North, and Bayelsa State on the southern coast.

In Ogoniland in southern Rivers State, dozens of opposition members and supporters were detained and charged with armed robbery and kidnapping.

Amnesty International is urging the Federal Government to carry out an independent, impartial and thorough judicial investigation, once the elections are concluded, into human rights abuses that occurred

during the election, and bring to justice those responsible.

Nigeria's national parliamentary, presidential and state elections will all be taking place between 2 and 16 April.