

PUBLIC

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22 February 2008

UA 50/08 Death threats/Fear for safety

KENYA Wangari Maathai (f), human rights defender

Human rights defender Professor Wangari Maathai received three death threats by mobile phone text message at around 12.30 am on 19 February, which read, "Because of your opposing the government at all times, Prof Wangari Maathai, we have decided to look for your head very soon, you are number three after Were, take care of your life." Two people working for her received similar threats on 19 and 21 February. The threats were signed "Mungiki", the name of an outlawed gang mainly of Kikuyu ethnicity, that has claimed responsibility for beheadings and other murders involving mutilation.

Prof Wangari Maathai is a former Member of Parliament. "Number three after Were" refers to MP Melitus Mugabe Were, who was killed outside his home in Nairobi on 29 January. A second MP, David Kimutai Too, was killed in Eldoret town on 31 January.

Prof Wangari Maathai believes the threats were a response to her call for increased pressure on both President Kibaki and opposition Orange Democratic Movement leader Raila Odinga to reach an agreement to deal with the political crisis in Kenya, and for her criticisms of politicians allied to the ruling Party of National Unity.

The Kenyan national press has reported Police Commissioner Major General Hussein Ali as saying that the Kenyan police are investigating the threats. The police recently removed the police bodyguard they had been providing to Prof Wangari Maathai after she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A number of human rights defenders have been receiving death threats since the general election, with pamphlets circulated which call them traitors to their community. At least one of them has been attacked as a result, and been forced to flee the country.

Following the 30 December announcement of the results of a general election that saw President Mwai Kibaki returned to power, violence broke out in different parts of Kenya. While the violence involved mass protests and riots, it quickly assumed an ethnic aspect, pitting ethnic communities which supported the opposition presidential candidate, Raila Odinga, against members of communities perceived to have supported President Kibaki. The Kikuyu ethnic group are largely perceived to have supported President Kibaki, while the Luo and Kalenjin ethnic groups are thought to have supported Raila Odinga. Over 1,000 people have died in the violence, many as a result of attacks by armed ethnic militia. Others have been killed by the police deployed to quell the violence and break up mass protests. Over 300,000 have been forced to flee their homes, and over 10,000 have fled as refugees into neighbouring Uganda. Since early February, the violence has reduced and largely stopped, as negotiations led by Kofi Annan have made progress towards a political settlement and possible power-sharing agreement.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Prof Wangari Maathai received death threats on 19 February;
- calling on the authorities to investigate these threats and to bring those responsible to justice;

- urging the authorities to protect her and other human rights defenders.

APPEALS TO:

Hon. Mwai Kibaki C.G.H. M.P
President of Kenya
PO Box 30510-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
Fax: +254 20 313600
Email: pps@statehousekenya.go.ke
Salutation: Your Excellency

Major General Mohamed Hussein Ali, M.G.H.
Commissioner of Police
PO Box 30083, Nairobi, Kenya
Fax: +254 20 240955
Salutation: Dear Commissioner

Hon. Prof George Saitoti
Minister of State for Internal Security
Harambee House, Harambee Avenue
P. O. Box 30510-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
Fax: +254 20 313600
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Kenya accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 April 2008.