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KENYA: PEACEFUL POLITICAL ACTIVISTS BEATEN AND WHIPPED

Amnesty International condemns the brutal assault on Kenyan government opponents in two separate incidents today by men armed with whips and clubs who allegedly included police officers and youth-wingers of the ruling party.

At 9.30 am the founder of the opposition Safina party, Richard Leakey, was attacked outside Nakuru Magistrate's Court where the case of human rights lawyers Paul Muite and Mirugi Kariuki was being heard.

Eyewitnesses state that plain-clothes Special Branch officers threw eggs and then stones at Richard Leakey, Njeri Kabeberi and several other Safina supporters. They were then assaulted by a group of men. Provincial CID police officers then reportedly threatened to shoot onlookers who might have tried to intervene. Richard Leakey was reportedly singled out and severely beaten and his car was damaged before he was able to leave Nakuru for Nairobi.

"Eyewitnesses tell us that they clearly identified the attackers as plain-clothes Special Branch officers," the human rights organization said. "Amnesty International strongly condemns what appears to be government-sponsored repression and ill-treatment of peaceful political activity."

Amnesty International is seriously concerned at the safety of human rights activists and journalists in Kenya in view of these attacks, and calls on the government to take immediate steps to ensure their protection from further attacks. The organization also calls for a full, prompt and independent investigation into these incidents, and to bring those responsible to justice.

Following a press conference to protest the attack, a group of Safina supporters said they would visit Koigi wa Wamwere, a human rights activist that Amnesty International believes is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned for his criticism of the government. The group, including several journalists and Koigi wa Wamwere's mother, was stopped on their way to the prison by a roadblock and then violently attacked by up to 40 men armed with whips and batons.

A number of them were seriously injured and subsequently hospitalized. Mirugi Kariuki's collar-bone was broken and he was badly bruised. Those hospitalized for their injuries include a female member of Kenya's Release Political Prisoners group, a non-violent pressure group, and four journalists, including a Kenya Television Network broadcaster and a reporter for the Daily Nation newspaper. They remain hospitalized at Nakuru War Memorial Hospital.

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Louise Tunbridge, a journalist for the British Daily Telegraph was also beaten and severely injured.

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