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Nigeria elections: Attack impunity not human rights!

In a report published today documenting cases of political violence and political killings, Amnesty International and Nigerian civil society organizations urge the Nigerian government and political candidates to take immediate and effective action against human rights abuses and to refrain from instigating political violence before, during and after the April 2007 elections.

Since March 2006, several candidates running for political office have been killed, including two candidates standing for the state governorship in the primary elections in Lagos and Ekiti State. Many other politicians and political candidates have been subjected to violent attacks or attempted killings.

Two days before the first round of elections on 14 April, Amnesty International continues to receive reports of politically motivated attacks, killings, destruction of property, violent clashes between rival political parties, and threats and intimidation of political candidates and supporters. Women prospective candidates, already an under-represented group in the elections, have also reported cases of threats, harassment and intimidation by their opponents.

This pattern of political violence is not new. The elections of 1999 and 2003 also resulted in several political killings, but the failure of the authorities to investigate them effectively and to bring the perpetrators to justice, has contributed to the current perception among the political class that violence is a legitimate tool for election campaigning.

Nigeria has an obligation under international law to respect and protect human rights, which requires that effective measures are taken to combat impunity. Only by clarifying the truth about what has happened, establishing accountability for human rights abuses, and by bringing to justice those responsible, in accordance with international human rights standards, can confidence in the justice system be restored and human rights protected in Nigeria.