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Kenya: Amnesty International calls for immediate investigation into execution-style killings of human rights activists

Amnesty International today called on the Kenyan government to investigate immediately yesterday's execution-style killings of two human rights activists.

The two men were shot dead in their car while stopped in traffic in the centre of Nairobi. It appeared to be a coordinated ambush. At least two gunmen fled the scene, according to eyewitnesses.

Oscar Kamau Kingara and Paul Oulu both worked with the Oscar Foundation Free Legal Aid Clinic (the Oscar Foundation), campaigning against illegal killings by the police and for the police to respect human rights in their security operations against alleged members of the Mungiki – a government-banned group operating in parts of Nairobi and central Kenya.

The Oscar Foundation has filed complaints against the Kenyan government in court, and called for investigations into illegal killings by police of people suspected of being members of Mungiki.

“Kenya must not become a place where it is unsafe to be a human rights defender. The Kenyan authorities should make it clear that attacks against those who promote human rights are completely unacceptable and that anyone who carries out such attacks will be brought to justice.”

The shooting followed a live television broadcast of a statement by a government spokesperson, Alfred Mutua, stating: "Mungiki has an NGO by the name of Oscar Foundation, which they use to try and get funds from overseas.... It is a front so that they can be able to carry out their activities”.

“It is unacceptable for the Kenyan government to make statements suggesting that opposition to illegal killings by the police amounts to support for banned groups,” said Erwin van der Borgh. “The government should make it clear that this is not the case, and pledge support and protection for anyone doing legitimate human rights work – even if it amounts to criticism of government practice.”

Notes to editors:

Amnesty International, the Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights and other Kenyan human rights organisations have documented the extra-judicial execution of hundreds of alleged Mungiki members by Kenyan security forces. On 27 February 2009, following a fact-finding mission in Kenya, the UN Special rapporteur on extra-judicial, arbitrary or summary executions issued a statement condemning these killings and calling for police perpetrators to be brought to justice. He also called for the resignation of the Police Commissioner and the Attorney-General of Kenya.

The Mungiki group is mainly active in Nairobi and parts of central Kenya. Group members say that they are guided by traditional religious and moral beliefs and the group claims to have a role in maintaining law and order and the running of the public transport industry in parts of Kenya.

Alleged members have demanded "protection fees" from owners of public service vehicles and been implicated in killings and the assault of members of the public.

Leaders of the group have publicly alleged that the group has tacit support from prominent government officials in the current and previous governments, but have so far not named any.

The previous government banned the group on 8 March 2002. At the time, the then-Commissioner of Police is reported to have categorized Mungiki as one of the "perpetrators of lawlessness and insecurity in the country. It is illegal and Kenyans are advised to keep away from them and their activities. Adherents to the group will be arrested and charged in court."