

7 February 2001

AI Index AFR 32/003/2001 - News Service Nr. 24

Kenya: Crackdown on Freedom of Expression Escalates

"The right to freedom of expression has been denied once more by police authorities in Kenya" Amnesty International said today, following the arrest on 4 February of opposition Member of Parliament James Orengo and two others in Kisii, western Kenya.

James Orengo, founding-member of *Muungano wa Mageuzi* (Movement for Change), a cross party lobby group, received severe injuries during his arrest by five police officers. At least 10 of his accompanying supporters were also injured by police. The next day, together with two others, Wilfred Monyenye and Christopher Matoke, James Orengo was then charged with "taking part in an unlawful assembly". They have denied the charge and are currently on bail.

James Orengo was part of a group of Members of Parliament who were attempting to deliver to police advance notification of their *Muungano wa Mageuzi* meeting, to be held on 9 February in Kisii. The police declined to accept the notification. The group were proceeding to the proposed venue for the meeting when police stopped and arrested James Orengo. Over 50 police armed with rifles, truncheons and tear gas then stormed several buildings, including hospitals, causing Kisii residents to flee in panic. Journalists were chased and their notebooks and cameras confiscated by police. Wilfred Monyenye and Christopher Matoke were arrested later that day.

Police have stated that they are refusing to allow another *Muungano wa Mageuzi* rally, planned to take place in Kisumu at the weekend of 10/11 February, to go ahead. The police claim the organizers have not specified what type of meeting it will be. James

Orengo MP has stated that he intends the rally to go ahead and Amnesty International has concerns for the safety of those who may try to attend.

These incidents are part of a series of violent attacks on pro-democracy rallies that reflect a continuing pattern of harassment of government critics in Kenya. In a number of these cases, the police have defended their actions by claiming that the organizers have failed to obtain permission for the rallies. However, this has been disputed by the organizers themselves who claim they did give advance notification of the meetings as required by the 1997 amendments to the Public Order Act. However, as can be seen on these last two occasions, police are now refusing to accept advance notification.

"More than three years after the 1997 amendments to the Public Order Act, which were intended in part to facilitate the holding of peaceful political meetings, the actions of the police continue to put in jeopardy freedom of expression in Kenya", Amnesty International said.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>