

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 113/96

Prisoners of conscience / Health concern

23 July 1996

KENYA Tirop KITUR, Chairperson of RPP  
Munga GATHOGO, Secretary of RPP  
Josephine Nyawira NGENGI (f)  
Kanenne KARARI  
Wahinya BOORE  
Munyua NJENGA  
Munyua NJUKI  
Mungai MBUTHI  
Maina WAITITU  
Wafula BUKE  
John BRITAI  
Kibuku KAHURA  
Wanjiru KAHIGA (f)  
Muriithi KANOTHO  
Virginia WANJIRU (f)  
Mwangi KIRAGU  
Ndungi GITHUJU  
Ditau WANGUTHI  
Njaroge WANGUTHI  
Muriu KATIUKI  
Muriithi NDUTHU

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Twenty-one members of the non-violent pressure group, Release Political Prisoners (RPP), arrested on 19 July 1996 in Kibera near Nairobi, are being held in appalling conditions in prison. There is serious concern for their health, particularly that of Josephine Nyawira Ngengi, a former prisoner of conscience, who recently underwent surgery following torture in police custody.

All 21 have been on hunger-strike since 20 July in protest at their detention and are only drinking water. Amnesty International considers all 21 detainees to be prisoners of conscience.

The RPP members had been trying to attend a three-day cultural meeting they had organized in memory of their Secretary General, Karimi Nduthu, who was murdered in March 1996. Under Kenyan law cultural meetings do not require a licence. They were refused entry by riot police to the venue of the meeting, Ufungamano House, on 18 July, and returned on 19 July to try to speak to the Director. The police again prevented their entry and attempted to arrest individual members of the group. The 21 linked arms and refused to separate. They were all then violently arrested by the police. They were held in Kilimani police station over the weekend and given access to their lawyers.

On 22 July they were charged with holding an illegal meeting and possessing seditious documents, which related to the death of Karimi Nduthu. The 21 appeared in court on 23 July, and were denied bail. They were remanded in prison until the next hearing on 19 August. The women are held in Lang'ata Women's Prison and the men in Industrial Area Remand Prison. The conditions in both prisons are known to be appalling.

Josephine Nyawira Ngengi, who was released in March 1996 after two years' imprisonment as a prisoner of conscience, is recovering from a hernia operation which she needed after suffering rapid weight loss following torture while in police custody. A special request was made in the hearing on 23 July that she be granted bail but the magistrate refused, saying that she would have access to a doctor in prison.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

RPP was set up in 1992 at the time of a rolling hunger-strike by women, led by a group of mothers of political prisoners, calling for the release of their sons. The group supports political prisoners and campaigns for their release. In March 1996 their Secretary General, Karimi Nduthu, was murdered in suspicious circumstances. Amnesty International expressed its deep concern to the authorities and sent a pathologist to witness the post-mortem examination.

Prison conditions in Kenya are harsh and women prisoners are not spared. Prisoners suffer from severe overcrowding and lack of adequate food, clothing, blankets and basic sanitary requirements. There are few, if any, medical facilities. In these conditions infectious diseases spread easily. In September 1995 a Kenyan High Court judge described Kenyan prisons as "death chambers" because of the high mortality rate. He noted that "going to prison these days has become a sure way for a death certificate". In October 1995 the Minister for Home Affairs, Francis Lotodo, announced that over 800 prisoners had died since the beginning of the year.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the 21 members of Release Political Prisoners, detained on 19 July 1996 while attempting to hold a peaceful meeting;
- expressing serious concern for their health, particularly that of Josephine Nyawira Ngengi, given the harsh prison conditions in which they are being held, and the fact that they are on hunger-strike, and urging that they be granted immediate access to all necessary medical facilities.

**APPEALS TO:**

President Daniel arap Moi  
Office of the President  
PO Box 30501, Nairobi, Kenya  
**Telegrams: President Moi, Nairobi, Kenya**  
**Telexes: 22003 FOREIGN ROB / 22796 FOREIGN RB**  
**Faxes: + 254 2 337340 (if no tone, please try later)**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Mr Amos Wako  
Attorney General  
Office of the Attorney General  
PO Box 40112, Nairobi, Kenya  
**Telegrams: Attorney General Wako, Sheria, Kenya**  
**Faxes: + 254 2 211 082**  
**Salutation: Dear Attorney General**

Mr Justice Abdul Majid Cocker  
Chief Justice  
Law Courts  
PO Box 30041, Nairobi, Kenya  
**Telegrams: Chief Justice Cocker, Nairobi, Kenya**  
**Salutation: Dear Chief Justice**

**COPIES TO:**

Kenya Human Rights Commission  
PO Box 55235  
Nairobi  
Kenya

Release Political Prisoners  
PO Box 50613  
Nairobi  
Kenya

and 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 19 August 1996.