

EXTERNAL

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Health Concern / Prisoners of conscience 9 December 1996

KENYA Koigi wa WAMWERE, aged 47, human rights activist, former political prisoner, former member of parliament, journalist
Charles Kuria WAMWERE, former political prisoner
G.G. Njuguna NGENGI, councillor for Molo, farmer

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the health of prisoner of conscience Koigi wa Wamwere, who was sentenced with the two other men above to four years' imprisonment and six strokes of the cane in October 1995.

On 4 November 1996, Koigi wa Wamwere was taken to a private hospital for a series of tests, including an electro-cardiogram (ECG) because of a heart abnormality. His cardiologist has expressed concern at this problem and has urged that Koigi wa Wamwere be released on bail in order that he may travel to South Africa or Europe for medical treatment which is not available in Kenya.

A hearing for his bail application took place before Chief Justice Cockar at the Kenya High Court on 9 December, at which Koigi wa Wamwere's lawyers were appealing against the decision to deny him bail. The matter is due to be considered in court again on 13 December.

Since being admitted to hospital Koigi wa Wamwere has been chained to the bed and guarded for 24 hours a day by about 20 prison guards, at least three times the number normally on duty. At least three guards are present even when he is being examined by the doctors. Under Kenyan law, doctors have the right to examine their patients in the presence, but not the hearing, of prison warders. The large number of guards has put pressure on the hospital and there is concern that this level of intimidation is being used to discourage private hospitals from agreeing to admit prisoners for medical treatment. The level of security is causing Koigi wa Wamwere considerable stress. His relatives have very limited access to him since his admission to hospital.

The other two political prisoners who were sentenced with Koigi wa Wamwere - Charles Kuria Wamwere and G.G. Njuguna Ngengi - were both prescribed special diets for medical reasons by senior doctors at Nairobi hospital following investigations during October 1996. The diets include recommendations that they receive eggs, fish, chicken, milk, brown bread and tea. These have reportedly not been fulfilled by the prison authorities and the two men are currently on partial hunger-strike in protest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Koigi wa Wamwere, his brother Charles Kuria Wamwere, and a local councillor G.G. Njuguna Ngengi, were charged with attempted robbery with violence following an alleged raid on Bahati police station near Nakuru in November 1993. Amnesty International believes that their arrest and sentencing to prison terms with corporal punishment is part of an increasingly violent pattern of harassment and intimidation of human rights activists, opposition figures and journalists. Shortly before his arrest Koigi wa Wamwere had formed a human rights organization, the National Democratic Human Rights Organization (NDEHURIO), which had been attempting to investigate and report on incidents of political violence in the Rift Valley and other parts of Kenya. Government involvement has been alleged in the ethnic-based violence which had killed over 1,500 people and displaced more than 300,000 since it began in December 1991. Conditions are harsh in many prisons in Kenya, amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. During 1996 there were reports of the deaths of scores of prisoners,

the majority as a result of infectious diseases due to severe overcrowding and shortages of food, clean water and basic medication.

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

- calling for the immediate release of Koigi wa Wamwere as a prisoner of conscience and urging that he be permitted to leave the country to receive vital medical treatment which is not available in Kenya;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Charles Kuria Wamwere and G.G. Njuguna Ngengi as prisoners of conscience;
- expressing concern that Charles Kuria Wamwere and G.G. Njuguna Ngengi are reportedly not receiving the diets prescribed by senior doctors at Nairobi hospital and requesting that these be provided without delay;

Note: 12 December is a national holiday in Kenya to celebrate Independence. In the past President Moi has released prisoners on this day.

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

Chief Justice Abdul Majid Cockar
Law Courts
Nairobi, Kenya
Telegrams: Chief Justice Cockar, Law Courts, Nairobi, Kenya
Faxes: +254 2 333449 (c/o Registrar's Office)
Salutation: Dear Chief Justice

COPIES TO:

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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 17 December 1996.