

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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Kenya: Amnesty International appeals to presidential candidates

The Secretary General of Amnesty International, Irene Khan is appealing to all presidential candidates and political party leaders to immediately call on their supporters not to abuse human rights, so that all Kenyans are able to participate freely and without fear in the forthcoming elections.

In an open letter to the presidential candidates and political leaders, Ms. Khan pointed expressed concern that human rights violations have already occurred in the run-up to the elections and since the nominations of presidential candidates.

"All presidential candidates and political party leaders should respect Kenya's Electoral Code of Conduct and prohibit the hiring of vigilante groups used to intimidate political opponents and supporters and/or to foment political violence, leading to human rights violations," she said

The last two multi-party elections in 1992 and in 1997 were marred by politically motivated violence, human rights abuses by politically and/or ethnically aligned militia, as well as by law enforcement officials.

Kenya has started a process of constitutional reform, which has presently been halted due to the upcoming elections. This process represents a unique opportunity to strengthen human rights protection for all Kenyans and to fulfill Kenya's obligations under international human rights law. The draft constitution made public on 27 September 2002 contains several provisions that would further guarantee the enjoyment of human rights in Kenya.

Amnesty International calls upon presidential candidates and political leaders to prioritize the constitutional reform process with a view to completing it within a reasonable period after the installation of a new parliament.

"We hope the new President of Kenya will actively support policies to protect and promote human rights," Ms. Irene Khan concluded.

Kenya was hit by a suicide car bomb attack against an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa just one month before the scheduled elections, resulting in the death of at least 13 people.

"There can be no justification for the deliberate targeting of civilians and Amnesty International unequivocally condemns all such attacks," Ms Khan said.

Several arrests have been made by Kenyan security services in connection with the attack, with investigators admitting that no evidence has been found so far to link those arrested with the attack.

Amnesty International is concerned that this incident may be used to justify restrictions on freedom of assembly, association, and movement, which would target followers of a particular religious or ethnic group, and undermine legal safeguards for those in detention.

"Presidential candidates should denounce any curbing of civil liberties and reduction of safeguards against human rights violations in the wake of this attack. Amnesty International believes that reinforcing respect for human rights is an important step towards improving security," the Secretary General added.

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NB:

Amnesty International will be sending an observer mission to Kenya from 18 - 30 December 2002. For further information, contact:

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