

KENYA

CONCRETE MEASURES NEEDED NOW TO PREVENT FURTHER VIOLENCE

AN OPEN LETTER FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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The 1990s have been marked by a series of disastrous armed conflicts which the international community has frequently found itself unwilling or unable to bring to a swift and satisfactory close. "If only we had been able to do something *before* the violence erupted," governments have been heard to say by way of response. "If only we had seen what was coming, we might have been able to do something to *prevent* this bloodshed. But it's far too late to stop the violence now."

The current escalating unrest in Kenya could well be the first stage of just such another preventable human rights catastrophe. And the time to take a good look at what is actually happening in the country - and what steps could be taken *today* to resolve the situation - is right now. If more international hand-wringing and expressions of regret are to be avoided in the months to come, the moment for action is clearly at hand.

The most recent wave of brutal suppression of democracy activists by the Kenyan security forces, the death threats against individual human rights activists and their organizations, and the latest violent curtailment of the scope for dissent in the country demand more from the international community than just condemnation of excessive police tactics - however appropriate that may be in the first instance. Governments around the world must not be deterred by the insistence of Kenya's rulers that this is a matter of internal affairs beyond the province of international concern. What has occurred in Kenya in the past few days is not just about domestic politics. It is about the failure of the Kenyan Government to ensure the basic human rights of all its citizens - as it has pledged to do in signing and ratifying a range of international human rights standards.

It is therefore imperative that the international community insists on progress toward the constitutional and legal reforms necessary for the creation of a genuine culture of human rights in Kenya without further delay. All those involved in the current crisis must be brought together immediately in a meaningful dialogue to ensure that freedom of expression, assembly and association are guaranteed to all Kenyans. Amnesty International believes that the international community can play a critical role in persuading the different parties to meet and engage in discussions aimed at preventing further human rights violations. The forthcoming meeting of the Paris Club (currently scheduled for August) provides an exceptional opportunity for participating states to encourage the Kenyan Government to help promote a peaceful climate and respect for human rights - particularly in the run-up to the elections expected to be held later this year.

In the interests of establishing an effective early warning system, the international community should also deploy human rights monitors - especially to rural areas - to register violations and raise them with the government. Public and visible support should be given to peaceful agents for change such as the church and independent local human rights organizations. Observers should also be sent to the civic education seminars which are being organized by the churches and human rights groups, and which have been broken up repeatedly by the authorities in the past months.

In its recently published **Human Rights Manifesto for Kenya**, Amnesty International has called on the Kenyan Government to meet the promises it has made to its people by signing and ratifying international human rights standards. If this appeal is to succeed, the firm backing of the international community is essential. To fail to provide such support at this crucial moment - through this appeal and through the actions recommended above - may be to miss a final opportunity to prevent a largely peaceful campaign for reform transforming into open conflict.

Individual Kenyan citizens - many of whom have worked tirelessly and at great risk to personal safety for peaceful change - would doubtlessly suffer most from any such descent into open conflict. But the impact of escalating violence on the prospects for the Kenyan economy should also give rise to significant international concern. Without a comprehensive solution to Kenya's long-term human rights problems, the threat to international business and investment in the country can only grow more menacing.

We know that international pressure on the Kenyan Government *can* be effective. In November 1991 the donor community withdrew aid to Kenya following sustained national and international pressure for a multiparty system and concerns over widespread corruption. Within three weeks the Kenyan Government legalized opposition parties and the first multi-party elections were held in 1992. The donor community subsequently restored aid in December 1993. Amnesty International is not calling for a cessation of aid to Kenya. But we would like to see the continuance of aid linked firmly to human rights issues - including legal and constitutional reform, and an end to the kind of human rights violations which have been endemic to the country long before this past week's headlines.

In June of this year, I led an Amnesty International delegation to Kenya and warned the international community that unless there was a serious attempt to resolve the human rights situation in the country the violence there would escalate. Sadly, that warning has proved all too accurate in recent days as an estimated 16 people have died in demonstrations and rioting in Kenya's streets and parks. A stream of denunciations of the excessive use of force have been forthcoming from the European Union states, from Japan, and from North America. But let that outrage now serve as the catalyst for more concrete measures. It is time to let the Kenyan Government know in no uncertain terms that it has crossed a line which will not be tolerated. It is time to let the forces for peaceful change in Kenya know that their struggle will not be forgotten or abandoned. It is time to ensure that Kenya becomes the 1990s human rights disaster that did not happen.

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