

Tanzania: Amnesty International welcomes creation of commission of inquiry into Zanzibar killings and violence

The formation of a commission of inquiry to investigate reports of human rights violations carried out by Tanzanian security forces during demonstrations in Zanzibar on 27 January 2001, if long overdue, is a welcome step, said Amnesty International today, in publishing its findings on human rights abuses during the demonstrations.

The report - Tanzania: Human rights concerns relating to demonstrations in Zanzibar on 27 January 2001 - details human rights violations committed by the security forces before, during and after the demonstrations, such as killings, mass arrests and torture, including rape. It also sets out a series of recommendations to the governments of Tanzania and Zanzibar on issues of concern to Amnesty International.

"We urge the commission to use Amnesty International's findings and recommendations as input to the inquiry," the organization said, adding that it "will be following closely the progress of the inquiry, particularly its capacity to provide a full account of the truth and its independence and impartiality."

Amnesty International has long called for an independent investigation to be set up into human rights violations committed in connection with the demonstrations.

The findings contained in the report were sent in an internal memorandum to the Tanzanian authorities in November 2001, to which no response has yet been received.

"The Tanzanian authorities must now allow the commission to carry out its work in a fully independent and transparent manner. The final report of the inquiry and the government's response must also be made public," the organization said.

The commission must be empowered and granted the necessary authority and resources for the task, and must be able to consult international human rights law experts and other related experts to enable it to identify and understand legal issues regarding the investigation.

During its investigations, Amnesty International was told by interviewees that victims of rape and sexual abuse would be willing to come forward and give testimony, if there was a genuinely independent and impartial inquiry, and if its work was conducted with due understanding of gender-sensitive issues.

"It is imperative that gender-sensitive training is provided to enable the commission to interview those women who may wish to report incidences of rape and sexual abuse. The authorities should also give guarantees that all those wishing to present evidence are allowed to do so without fear of reprisals."

Amnesty International also stresses the need for anyone found responsible for human rights violations to be brought to justice in conformity with international standards of fairness and without recourse to the death penalty. Compensation must also be provided for victims or their families.

"The Tanzanian authorities now have the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the future protection of human rights.

The full truth of last January's events must now be heard, and measures put into place to prevent future tragedy."

Background

On 27 January 2001, the opposition Civic United Front (CUF) organized demonstrations in Zanzibar and mainland Tanzania, demanding a re-run of the October 2000 elections. The government banned the demonstrations and proceeded to violently disperse the demonstrators. At least 22 people were shot dead by armed police on Pemba island in circumstances suggesting unlawful use of lethal force. There were mass arrests. Some of those arrested were subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

On 10 October 2001 the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), Party of the Revolution, signed an agreement with the CUF to end the political impasse following the January violence. The agreement included a number of human rights issues, including establishing an independent commission of inquiry and providing compensation to those affected by the January violence.

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The report is available

at:"<http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/afr560012002>"

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