

PUBLIC

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Ill-treatment/Fear for Safety

11 January 1999

KENYA

Wangari Maathai

A peaceful demonstration against the handover of public land to developers at Karura Forest, northern Nairobi, was violently broken up by security guards on 8 January 1999. Police at the scene did nothing to stop the violence, suggesting the security guards acted with the support of the government. The demonstrators intend to return to the site, and Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

A group of about 20 protesters including MPs and journalists had gone to the forest to try and plant seedlings on land that had been cleared for development. Police were seen talking to the security guards, who were reportedly armed with machetes, clubs, whips and bows and arrows, moments before the demonstration was broken up, and made no effort to intervene.

Private development of public forest land has been extremely controversial in Kenya, with senior government officials reportedly benefiting from the land allocations. The non-violent Greenbelt environmental group, which organised the Karura demonstration, has vowed to fight the development of public land by replanting trees. Greenbelt is led by Wangari Maathai, a former Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience and human rights activist. She was apparently hit with a club during the break-up of the demonstration, and needed stitches to a head wound, from which she lost a lot of blood. She is still in hospital.

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

- expressing concern about the ill-treatment of peaceful demonstrators on 8 January 1999;
- urging the authorities to set up a prompt and impartial investigation into the events at Karura Forest, ensuring that those responsible for using excessive force are brought to justice;
- seeking assurance that the police will protect participants from violence at future peaceful demonstrations.

APPEALS TO:

Major Marsden Madoka
Minister of State (responsible for internal security)
Office of the President
PO Box 30510
Nairobi, Kenya
Telegrams: Major Madoka, Nairobi, Kenya
Faxes + 254 2 337340 (if no tone please try later)
Salutation: Dear Major

Commissioner Duncan Wachira
Commissioner of Police
PO Box 30083
Nairobi, Kenya
Telegrams: Police Commissioner Wachira, Nairobi, Kenya
Faxes: +254 2 330495
Salutation: Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Mr Amos Wako
Attorney General
PO Box 40112
Nairobi
Kenya
Faxes: +254 2 211082

Mr Francis Lotodo
Minister for Natural Resources
Ministry of Natural Resources
Kencom House
PO Box 30126
Nairobi
Tel: +2542 29261 (No fax)

The Daily Nation,
PO Box 49010, Nairobi
Faxes: + 254 2 213946

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 22 February 1999.