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Tanzania: Amnesty International calls for independent inquiry into Zanzibar killings and torture

Amnesty International is calling on the Tanzanian Government to establish an independent and impartial inquiry into the recent killings, systematic torture and mass arbitrary arrests of opposition party supporters in Zanzibar during and after the demonstrations of 27 January 2001.

“If the rule of law, the protection of human rights, and justice for victims and survivors of the recent spate of violence are to be ensured, the Tanzanian Government must establish and explain what happened, as well as bring to justice any public official responsible for human rights abuses and unlawful action. Tanzania must abide by the obligations of international human rights treaties it has signed,” the organization stressed.

Preliminary findings by an Amnesty International mission to Tanzania confirm reports of torture, including rape and beatings, as well as indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against civilians, including women and children. Women were stripped naked at gunpoint, at times in front of their families or male police officers. The delegation received eyewitness testimonies indicating that most of the killings by security forces may have been unlawful. There was evidence that Tanzanian security forces violated the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms which states that the use of lethal force must be still be consistent with the principles of necessity and proportionality.

“The international community must bring pressure to bear on the government of Tanzania to respect fundamental human rights guaranteed by international rights law to which it is signatory. All torture and ill-treatment of prisoners and those responsible should be brought to justice. It should also ensure that future public meetings and demonstrations can proceed peacefully,” Amnesty International emphasized.

Background

The opposition Civic United Front (CUF), on 27 January 2001, organized demonstrations in Pemba and Zanzibar demanding a re-run of the October 2000 elections which were generally faulted by local and international observers as not free and fair. The government banned and proceeded to violently disperse the demonstrators. Many people were shot dead by Zanzibar and federal police, and there were mass arrests. Those arrested were subjected to torture and harsh treatment. Although most of those arrested have now been released on bail, 20 people including a member of the local parliament are still held on charges of killing a police officer.

Some 2000 refugees from the violence are currently seeking asylum in Kenya.

Note to editors

An Amnesty International delegation consisting of representatives from AI's US section and its International Secretariat in London, and including the director of a leading Kenyan women lawyers'

NGO (FIDA-Kenya), is currently on a fact finding mission to Tanzania. It will host a press briefing at the Tanzanian Information Centre in Dar es Salaam on Friday 2 March 2001, at 10am. It can be reached by phone at (255) 744 368 942.

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