

# Opposition Officials Helped Plan Rift Valley Violence

## Police Should Protect Displaced Persons Camps

(Eldoret, January 24, 2008) – Human Rights Watch investigations indicate that, after Kenya’s disputed elections, opposition party officials and local elders planned and organized ethnic-based violence in the Rift Valley, Human Rights Watch said today. The attacks, targeting mostly Kikuyu and Kisii people in and around the town of Eldoret, could continue unless the government and opposition act to stop the violence, Human Rights Watch said.

Human Rights Watch called on the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) leadership to take immediate steps to stop its supporters from committing further attacks. At the same time, Human Rights Watch said the Kenyan police should urgently deploy extra officers to the region to protect displaced people and resident Kikuyu communities.

“Opposition leaders are right to challenge Kenya’s rigged presidential poll, but they can’t use it as an excuse for targeting ethnic groups,” said Georgette Gagnon, acting Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “We have evidence that ODM politicians and local leaders actively fomented some post-election violence, and the authorities should investigate and make sure it stops now.”

Research by Human Rights Watch in and around the town of Eldoret, which has borne the brunt of the Rift Valley violence, indicates that attacks by several ethnic communities against others, especially local Kikuyu populations, were planned soon after the elections. In some cases, local elders and opposition politicians appear to have incited and organized the violence. Since December 27, 2007, clashes between members of the Kalenjin and Luya communities and their Kikuyu and Kisii neighbors in the Rift Valley have left more than 400 people dead and have displaced thousands more.

Human Rights Watch interviewed members of several pro-ODM Kalenjin communities who described the ways in which local leaders and ODM party agents actively fomented violence against Kikuyu communities. A Kalenjin preacher in a village in Eldoret North constituency told Human Rights Watch that on the morning of December 29, 2007, a local ODM party mobilizer “called a meeting and said that war had broken in Eldoret town, so the elders organized the youth into groups of not less than 15, and they went to loot [Kikuyu] homes and burn them down.”

The following day, the village held another meeting and the youth marched to the nearby town of Turbo. They were turned away by police. But they returned early the next morning, catching the police off guard, “and burnt almost half of the Kikuyu shops in town, including the petrol station,” according to the preacher. Human Rights Watch visited Turbo and found that most Kikuyu-owned buildings had been laid to ruin by the

attackers. Displaced Kikuyu seeking shelter at the police station in Turbo confirmed to Human Rights Watch that their homes and businesses were destroyed by groups of Kalenjin youth.

Human Rights Watch spoke to numerous members of Kalenjin communities around Eldoret who provided similar accounts. In many communities, local leaders and ODM mobilizers arranged frequent meetings following the election to organize, direct and facilitate the violence unleashed by gangs of local youth. In one case, an ODM councillor candidate is said to have provided a lorry to ferry youth to burn the homes of Kikuyu families in a neighboring community.

Many Kalenjin community leaders told Human Rights Watch that if the area's ODM leadership or the local Kalenjin radio station KASS FM told people unequivocally to stop attacks on Kikuyu homes, then they believe the violence would stop. "If the leaders say stop, it will stop immediately," said one Kalenjin elder.

Human Rights Watch also collected accounts from several Kalenjin men present at community meetings where local elders and ODM mobilizers urged Kalenjin residents to contribute money toward the purchase of automatic weapons. Some communities have reportedly managed to obtain such weapons already. The same sources confirmed that plans have already been made to attack camps of displaced Kikuyu and the two remaining neighborhoods in Eldoret town where many Kikuyu homes remain intact – Langas and Munyaka.

The Kenyan police are already investigating responsibility for the violence in the Rift Valley, but its forces are overstretched by the nationwide electoral crisis. In the light of apparent plans by some groups to attack camps for internally displaced persons, Human Rights Watch called on the Kenyan police to ensure that all locations of displaced people are adequately protected against attack. Fourteen displaced Kikuyu and Kisii people sheltering in a monastery in Kipkelion were killed last week in an attack by Kalenjin warriors. The sprawling tent camp in Eldoret is now home to more than 10,000 displaced persons, with only a light police presence to protect them. Any attack on the camp would likely prove disastrous. Other equally vulnerable camps have been set up in other areas.

"The murder of people sheltering at a monastery in Kipkelion illustrates the need for better police protection of displaced people," said Gagnon. "Protecting the thousands of vulnerable people chased from their homes across the Rift Valley from further attack should be a priority for the Kenyan police."

## **Background**

Kenyans voted peacefully and in record numbers in parliamentary and presidential elections on December 27, 2007. In the parliamentary elections, 99 of the 210 seats were won by the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Incumbent Vice-President Moody Awori and 14 of incumbent President Mwai Kibaki's top ministers lost their seats.

According to independent observers, the presidential vote count appeared to be tampered with to such an extent as to make it impossible to determine who won the vote. Even the chairman of the Electoral Commission of Kenya admitted that he did “not know whether Mr. Kibaki won the elections.” The European Union Electoral Mission expressed grave doubts about the legitimacy of the presidential results. The most significant fraud appears to have been committed by the government camp in the final stages of tallying the votes.

The sudden announcement that Kibaki had won the vote triggered protests throughout the country. The protests, along with widespread post-election violence and the brutal police suppression of opposition protests, has plunged the country into crisis. Talks between the opposition ODM and the Kibaki government are proceeding under the auspices of a panel of eminent African personalities led by Kofi Annan, former United Nations secretary-general.

Violence erupted in the wake of the disputed elections throughout the Rift Valley and the west of the country as angry citizens burned and looted factories, shops and homes, and chased those perceived to be supporters of Kibaki (mostly, but not exclusively, members of his Kikuyu tribe) away. Kikuyu homes in the Rift Valley have been selectively burned and Kikuyu residents killed. Thirty people were burned to death in a church near Eldoret where they had been seeking shelter.

The police confirmed the deaths of 526 people nationwide, including 81 shot by police officers, but independent estimates suggest that the total figure could be much higher. Thousands of Kikuyu and members of other tribes have been displaced and are in the process of leaving the region if they can.