

Kenya: Crackdown on refugees following hotel bombing

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The New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) has accused police in Kenya of using the terrorist attacks in the country on November 28 to justify a crackdown on refugees living in the capital Nairobi.

Kenyan police have conducted three large-scale raids and dozens of arbitrary arrests against refugees from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo since November 29, according to an HRW report. The largest group arrests—of 54 Sudanese and Congolese refugees—occurred on November 29 when Kenyan police carried out house-to-house arrests in Kawangware, a slum neighbourhood to the southwest of Nairobi.

Some refugees described being beaten by the police and a number of others avoided arrest only by bribing police officers. Among those arrested were several children and two Congolese women with UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees)-issued documents allowing them to remain in Nairobi for security reasons. The two women were waiting to be resettled in a third country as they were considered to be in danger in Kenya.

The refugees spent the night in a 40-by-30 metre cell at the Muthangari police station in Nairobi. One Congolese woman was arrested along with her child. According to HRW, she counted up to eight children detained in the cell with their mothers. Detained women were forced to clean the cell and the UNHCR was not allowed access to the refugees until midday on November 30 when those with documentation were released. Some of the Sudanese refugees remain in detention.

Police at the Muthangari station told UNHCR officials that the terrorist attacks in Mombasa were the “rationale” for the crackdown in Nairobi. But the Kenyan police made no official link between the

terrorist attacks and the detained refugees in Nairobi and did not provide any evidence linking those refugees arrested with the atrocities in Mombasa. The report by HRW states that to their knowledge no refugee was charged with criminal acts or terrorist-related activity.

Alison Parker of HRW said, “Acts of violence, however terrible, never justify a government roundup of refugees.” She went on to accuse the government in Kenya of “scapegoating marginal groups such as refugees.”

Police spokesman King’ori Mwangi called HRW representatives “busybodies” and gave an indication as to the real nature of the arrests and beatings when he told reporters, “Kenya is for Kenyans.”

President Daniel arap Moi and his Kenya African National Union (KANU) government have seized on the recent terrorist atrocities in the country as an opportunity to develop closer ties with the Bush administration. KANU views a closer relationship with Washington as a means of strengthening its grip on power in Kenya and seeks to use repressive state measures against any opposition.

Moi and the Bush administration are seeking to strengthen the quid pro quo arrangement between the two countries that has been cultivated since September 11. Moi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi both met with President Bush in Washington on December 5. The White House meeting was also attended by Secretary of State Colin Powell, then Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neil and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.

Bush described both African leaders as “strong friends” of America that had joined the US to “fight the global war on terrorism.”

A report on *Stratfor.com* states that Moi was in Washington to discuss a very specific agenda with the

Bush administration: the upcoming presidential elections in Kenya due to take place December 27. The report sheds some light on what is behind the actions of both the Bush administration and the KANU government in the Horn of Africa region.

According to the report, Moi was at the Washington meeting to secure the tacit approval of the Bush administration in his attempts to hold on to power in Kenya through his handpicked successor and KANU presidential candidate, Uhuru Kenyatta. Moi is in his final term of office and will be standing down as KANU leader after the December elections.

The report states that the Bush administration would be willing to “look the other way” regarding incidents that might arise during the elections concerning “intimidation, violence and voting fraud,” provided the US government was allowed a “freer hand in Kenya.”

According to *Stratfor*, though Moi is leaving office in a couple of weeks, “Washington is confident that he will continue to wield power behind the scenes after the Dec. 27 elections.”

The report describes the US military build-up in Kenya and the joint military exercises conducted between the two countries around the Manda Bay naval base on Kenya’s northeastern coast. It states that Washington is seeking to use Kenya as its “southern anchor for an encirclement of Somalia ... and an expansion of naval control over the western half of the Indian Ocean basin and the southern parts of the Arabian Sea.”

In return for allowing Moi and his KANU party functionaries to rig the elections in Kenya, Washington will be allowed to tighten its grip around the Horn of Africa region and use Kenya as a staging ground for future military assaults.



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