



LAW SOCIETY
OF SOUTH AFRICA
PRESS RELEASE

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LAW SOCIETY SHOCKED AT MURDER OF KENYAN HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER

The Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) expresses its shock at the torture and murder of Kenyan human rights lawyer Willie Kimani, allegedly by members of the Kenyan National Police Service.

'We extend our condolences to our colleagues in Kenya and join the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) in expressing serious concern at what LSK Chairperson Isaac Okero has described as a dark day for the rule of law in Kenya,' say LSSA Co-Chairpersons Mvuso Notyesi and Jan van Rensburg. They add: 'The perpetrators must be seen to be dealt with to the full extent of the law.'

It is understood that Mr Kimani, a young human rights lawyer with the US legal aid group International Justice Mission – which deals with cases of police abuse of power – focused on defending political prisoners and victims of state abuse. Mr Kimani was defending a client who had accused local police of harassing and intimidating him in a bid to have him withdraw a complaint against a senior officer with the local Administration Police Unit.

Mr Kimani, his client and a taxi driver disappeared on 23 June and their bodies were found last Thursday evening in a river near Nairobi with signs of severe torture.

Mr Okero has been quoted as saying that the legal profession's worst fears had been confirmed. Advocates and citizens are at risk of elimination by police death squads. The rule of law is under a serious threat, where the guardians of the rule of law risk their lives; then every Kenyan must be afraid. He stressed that failure by those charged with security cannot be tolerated.

Although three police officers suspected of being linked to the disappearance of Mr Kimani and his associates have been arrested, Kenyan lawyers are threatening to strike this week if senior police officers Inspector-General Joseph Boinnet and Deputy Inspector-General Samuel Arachi as well as Interior Cabinet Secretary Joseph Nkaissery do not resign over the killings.

'Lawyers must be able to carry out their professional duties without fear of harassment or other threats. We stress the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers,

which state that: "Governments shall ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference and that lawyers shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognised professional duties, standards and ethics". We urge the Kenyan Government to ensure that all lawyers in their country are treated with the above respect and security of person which is due to them,' say Mr Notyesi and Mr Van Rensburg.

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA, MVUSO NOTYESI AND JAN VAN RENSBURG

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Editor's note:

The Law Society of South Africa brings together its six constituent members – the Cape Law Society, the KwaZulu-Natal Law Society, the Law Society of the Free State, the Law Society of the Northern Provinces, the Black Lawyers Association and the National Association of Democratic Lawyers – in representing South Africa's 24 300 attorneys and 5 000 candidate attorneys.