

and encourages a greater scale of lawlessness the longer their conduct goes unpunished. Civil society leaders, human rights activists and other sources widely accused the police of turning a blind eye to the abuses of *Kalare* thugs, especially those working on behalf of the PDP. During the elections, one police officer complained confidentially to Human Rights Watch: “Politics is making our life very difficult. PDP supporters are not arrested, or if they are, [police officials] han[d] them over to the governor.”³⁵⁵

Several sources alleged to Human Rights Watch that PDP youth leader Abu Maazu extorts regular payments from the eleven local government chairmen in the state for “protection” services provided by *Kalare*, who are also members of his PDP youth organization. One senior lawyer who had interviewed the local government chairmen put these payments at N500,000 [US\$4000] per month for each local government, and there are 11 local governments in the state.³⁵⁶ Other activists and the Gombe Elders Forum alleged the same.³⁵⁷ In an interview with Human Rights Watch, Maazu denied any such arrangement, claiming that, “individual politicians contribute to the youth wing of the party on an individual basis.”³⁵⁸ The police allegedly took no action to investigate these allegations and Gombe’s Commissioner of Police would not comment on the matter to Human Rights Watch.

Several civil society sources described instances where police officers themselves were working on behalf of the PDP, violating the law as well as the principle of electoral neutrality. For example, on gubernatorial Election Day in Tal, a town in Bildiri district, IDASA monitors told Human Rights Watch what transpired when police in the company of PDP officials tried to remove ballot boxes from a polling station before people had finished voting:

The crowds tried to stop them [police and PDP officials] taking the boxes away. The police fired into the air to disperse the crowds. One of the bullets went into a house

³⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with police officer [name withheld], Gombe town, April 20, 2007.

³⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Ibrahim Hussein, Gombe town, April 23, 2007.

³⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with activist [name withheld], Gombe town, April 20, 2007 and Suleiman Humo, Gombe town, April 20, 2007.

³⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Abu Maazu, PDP Youth Leader, Gombe town, April 22, 2007.

and killed a child, a girl. The residents chased the PDP officials out of the town and set fire to the police station. Two PDP members were injured with machetes and were committed to the Federal Medical Centre in Gombe town.³⁵⁹

Prior to the April 2007 elections, the police in Gombe detained dozens of opposition supporters, mostly Action Congress members, in the run-up to the elections. Many activists and community leaders complained to Human Rights Watch about the number of political detainees being kept in Gombe prison ahead of the elections. Even the Emir, the traditional ruler of Gombe, a government sympathizer, expressed concern about politically-motivated detentions. In an interview with Human Rights Watch he said, “These are not robbers who have committed any crime. The approach of the police is not humane, they are simply grabbing people and throwing them into jail...The police should help the public, not terrorize them.”³⁶⁰ One opposition lawyer told Human Rights Watch that he was representing over 200 cases of opposition party members who had been unlawfully detained without trial in the months preceding the elections.³⁶¹

On April 20, 2007, the night before the presidential elections, Human Rights Watch interviewed ten opposition supporters being held in one cell in Gombe police headquarters. Their police guards acknowledged that they had been detained for purely political reasons. “They should be released,” one of the policeman said. “They should be free, they are human beings like you; they have human rights.”³⁶² The police officers and the prisoners claimed that there were many more detainees being held in separate cells in the Criminal Investigation Department. The head of Gombe’s Criminal Investigation Department told Human Rights Watch there were no political detainees in CID custody, but refused to allow access to the CID cells, stating: “If I say we don’t have such people here, then we don’t have.”³⁶³

³⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with IDASA monitor [name withheld], Gombe town, April 22, 2007.

³⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with the Emir of Gombe, Gombe town, April 20, 2007.

³⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Yusuf Mailouma, Barrister, Mailouma and Co., Gombe town, April 20, 2007.

³⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with prisoners [names on file with HRW] and with Unnamed Police Officer, Gombe police station, April 20, 2007.

³⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Assistant Commissioner of Police, Salisu A.Fagge, Head of CID, Gombe State, April 20, 2007.