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Central African Republic: Cruel and inhumane treatment for 'association' with opposition

Disturbing patterns of arbitrary arrests, long-term detention without charge or trial as well as appalling prison conditions are condemned in a new report on the Central African Republic released by Amnesty International today.

The report, 'Central African Republic: Government tramples on the basic rights of detainees', charts the arbitrary arrest and detention of over 40 people since the beginning of 2006 for alleged connections with armed opposition groups or opposition politicians.

"In some cases people have seemingly been targeted for no other reason than sharing the same ethnicity as a leader of an armed opposition group. All have been held without charge in appalling prison conditions for months on end, with no access to lawyers. Those that have eventually faced charges have in most cases been acquitted by the courts."

"This signifies a menacing new approach to the issue of internal security, one that flouts the most fundamental standards of national law and international human rights law," said Godfrey Byaruhanga, Amnesty International's researcher on the Central African Republic.

In one incident, 14 detainees declared innocent by the court of undermining internal security were forcibly transferred by the presidential guard - - which is directly responsible to President François Bozizé - - from the capital, Bangui, to a prison that was initially kept secret by the authorities. They were held for 13 days in Bossembélé prison until pressure from lawyers and human rights organizations including Amnesty International, secured their release. Although more than 20 detainees have been released after being acquitted, more than 20 others, including Claude Yabanda - - former president of a legally recognised political party the Patriotic Front for Progress - - remain in custody without knowing if or when they will be brought to trial.

The report also outlines the shocking condition of prisons where these and other prisoners are held. Prisoners are denied food and access to basic medical care, exposing them to the risk of life-threatening diseases. They are also subjected to highly unsanitary and degrading conditions including overcrowded cells with overflowing toilets and no light.

Such conditions can have devastating and far-reaching consequences for those detained. One case highlighted in the report is that of Lydie Florence Ndouba, among those arrested in March 2006 for being a threat to internal security. Denied medical treatment in jail, Lydie Ndouba had a miscarriage in custody. She was later cleared of all charges by the court.

“The prison conditions witnessed during our recent visit to the Central African Republic are among the worst ever witnessed by members of the Amnesty International delegation. The government of the Central African Republic must act without delay to address these totally unacceptable conditions and fulfil their obligations to all detainees under international human rights law”, Godfrey Byaruhanga said.

Notes to editors

The report is based on a mission to the Central African Republic undertaken in May 2006 after Amnesty International received reports of a number of arrests and detention without charge of people suspected of supporting armed groups opposed to the government of President François Bozize. Amnesty International requested access to the detainees and was then able to assess the general conditions of several detention centres in the Central African Republic.

It is thought that this wave of arrests was sparked by the arrest in February 2006 of a former army lieutenant, Jean-Jacques Larmassoun, reportedly a leader of an armed opposition group known as the Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy. The arrests are indicative of the general unease that has pervaded the country since President Bozizé won the presidential elections in May 2005.

Public Document

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