

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AFR 57/010/2005 (Public Document)

Press Service Number : 100

20 April 2005

Togo: Free participation in election process is made impossible

Statement of the Togo Coalition:
Amnesty International,
ACAT-France (Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture),
Agir ensemble pour les droits de l'Homme (Act Together for Human Rights)
Franciscans International,
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH),
FIACAT (Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture International
Federation),
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT),
Secours Catholique-Caritas France (Catholic Aid-Caritas France),
Survie (Survival)

The Togo Coalition today issues a warning to the international committee about the systematic and persistent violation of human rights by the Togolese government and armed groups close to the ruling party, in the run-up to the presidential election on 24 April 2005.

The Togo Coalition believes that, in the current circumstances, free participation in the election process, as defined by international standards, cannot be guaranteed.

Since the announcement of the death of General Gnassingbé Eyadéma, on 5 February 2005, the coalition has gathered evidence showing that the Togolese government persists in its policy of intimidation of the population, the arbitrary arrest of opposition supporters and illegal restrictions on the freedoms of assembly, association and expression.

The persistent and systematic violation of human rights, observed in Togo for many years, and the deliberate absence of will on the part of the government to pursue alleged perpetrators of such acts through the judicial system, prevents the Togolese people from taking part in the election freely and without fear. The climate of intimidation and harassment in which the elections are being organised requires a firm response from the whole international community, including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations.

The coalition is particularly concerned about the abuses of human rights perpetrated by the government and armed groups of its supporters:

- Arbitrary arrests aimed at hindering the opposition's electoral campaign, especially the detention of opposition campaign activists;

- Acts of political violence, especially the beating up of opposition supporters, the vandalizing of venues selected for opposition meetings and the ban on meetings imposed on some opposition parties;
- Attempts to muzzle private media;
- Many acts of harassment and intimidation of opposition supporters, leading to the fear of post-election reprisals in the constituencies that vote for the opposition.

One week away from the presidential election, pressure continues to increase and confirms the government's determination to prevent the holding of free and pluralist elections. On 15 April 2005, the *Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication*, the High Audiovisual and Communication Authority, informed private radio and television stations that they were "*not authorised to provide media coverage of all candidates' campaigns*" nor "*to organise special broadcasts of debates involving opposition candidates or their representatives*".

Moreover, there were more clashes on Saturday, 16 April, in Lomé, between opposition supporters and supporters of the party in power, armed with studded clubs, whips and firearms.

The Togo coalition calls on the international community to intervene urgently with the Togolese authorities and all presidential election candidates to prevent further human rights violations, in accordance with international and regional standards that Togo has ratified, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. It also requests the international community to send a clear message to the Togolese authorities so that electors can vote freely, without fear or hindrance in the next election.