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Government-backed agents of torture and death in DRC

The government of President Joseph Kabila must launch an urgent and independent investigation into the systematic detention, torture and murder of alleged political opponents committed by security forces in the DRC, said Amnesty International in a report released today.

The report *DRC: Torture and killings by state security agents still endemic*, documents the leading role taken by the Special Services police (*Direction des Renseignements Généraux et Services Spéciaux de la police*) in the arbitrary arrest and torture of scores of supposed political opponents of President Kabila's ruling party. The crackdown took place in the capital Kinshasa during and after the 2006-2007 electoral period.

"Many people have been targeted by the security forces simply because they share the same ethnicity as Jean-Pierre Bemba, Kabila's main political rival, during the elections," said Erwin van der Borgh, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

"Many of these individuals are still in prison without charge or trial. All those interviewed by Amnesty International reported torture and ill-treatment in detention and yet no member of the security forces has been brought to justice. The climate of intimidation and fear in Kinshasa has intensified as a result," he added.

The report also highlights grave human rights violations by President Kabila's Republican Guard (*Garde Républicaine*) in the wake of fighting in Kinshasa in March 2007 between government forces and fighters loyal to Jean-Pierre Bemba. These include the alleged murder of at least 27 detainees in late March 2007, whose bodies were then dumped in the River Congo.

The slow progress of Security Sector Reform and an institutional culture that permits serious human rights violations are cited in the report as key factors preventing substantial progress on human rights in the DRC.

"Despite historic national elections, deep political uncertainty persists in the DRC and respect for human rights has not advanced. Many security forces continue to serve narrow political interests and this lies at the root of the lack of public confidence felt by most Congolese," said Erwin van der Borgh.

"It is crucial that police reform becomes a priority and that the Kabila government renews efforts to ensure all government and armed opposition forces are integrated into one politically-neutral and accountable entity that operates within Congolese and international human rights law."

“As part of its continued support to Security Sector Reform, the international community should insist on robust DRC government action now to end impunity for human rights violations and bring the perpetrators to justice,” said Erwin van der Borght.

Notes to Editors

Fighting in March 2007 in Kinshasa between government forces and fighters loyal to Jean-Pierre Bemba resulted in the deaths of up to 600 people, including many civilians who were victims of indiscriminate and disproportionate fire by both armed forces. Jean-Pierre Bemba’s fighters were also responsible for human rights abuses and were a source of major insecurity in the city in the run-up to the fighting.

Testimonies in the report include:

Coquette Nsinga, a 25 year old student and member of Jean Pierre Bemba’s *Mouvement de Liberation du Congo* (MLC). Detained by the Special Services police two days after the second round of elections on 31 October 2006, she was beaten and then raped by five policemen. Denied any medical assistance, she was held for eight months in detention without charge until she appeared before a military tribunal charged with ‘incitement to commit acts contrary to duty or discipline’. Her trial is ongoing.

Colonel Paul Ndokayi, aged 61, a professional soldier who served with government forces throughout the DRC conflict and was arrested in late November 2006 by Special Services police in Kinshasa. Accused of being a ‘brother of Bemba’ by his interrogators, Col Paul Ndokayi endured five hours of continuous torture with ropes, chains and knives. Charged with ‘terrorism’, Col Paul Ndokayi has remained in detention for the past 10 months without trial or adequate medical attention. He has not been given the opportunity to challenge the lawfulness of his detention or bring his torturers to justice.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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