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Central African Republic: Government should stop all extra-judicial executions

Amnesty International today called on the government of the Central African Republic to end further human rights violations after eight weeks of killings and detentions. Bangui, the capital, remains in a climate of fear since a failed coup on 28 May 2001 against President Ange-Félix Patassé.

"Hundreds of unarmed civilians and Yakoma member of the security forces involved or suspected of involvement in the coup attempt have been killed or subjected to other serious human rights violations by the state security forces. New cases of summary executions continue to be reported," the human rights organization said.

"Since the failed coup, many people have been killed or arrested while returning to their place of work," the organization said. Amnesty International has made appeals to the authorities to ensure the safety of all those who have been detained and at risk of ill-treatment, torture and extrajudicial execution.

The coup attempt was allegedly led by former President, General André Kolingba, head of state from 1981 to 1993. He is a member of the Yakoma ethnic group and most of the victims of human rights violations are also from the Yakoma community, which is suspected of being involved in the coup attempt or supportive of General Kolingba. Amnesty International is extremely concerned by the lack of protection and security for, and the threat of violence against, the Yakoma community.

The body of one Yakoma victim, **Theophile Touba**, a former Member of Parliament and university professor, was found on 1 June 2001 in front of President Patassé's official residence. He was arrested by members of the Presidential Guard and accused of involvement in planning the coup attempt. His nine-year-old son and two other relatives were murdered the previous day.

A Yakoma teacher at the University of Bangui, **Wanguia-Bickot Evrard**, his 18-year-old son, **Wanguia-Bickot Romaric**, and his 30-year-old cousin, **Kongbeya Olivier**, were shot dead by presidential guards on 6 June as they returned to Bangui.

On 12 June, a gendarmerie captain who was director of the Gendarmerie Training School in Kolongo and two other gendarmes, **Patrice Igawe** and **Zoe-Virginie Yendimon** -- the latter said to have been pregnant, were killed by presidential guards when they returned to work. All belonged to the Yakoma ethnic group.

Sergeant **Emery Konguende**, a young Yakoma armed forces officer, was on leave when the attempted coup began. He was tortured and killed on 29 May by presidential guards, as he returned to his unit.

Caporal Chef **Alfred Kokassa**, member of the Yakoma ethnic group, was reportedly executed on 9 July, after being interrogated by the presidential guard of the government.

Eight weeks after coup attempt, the situation in Bangui remains tense, especially in the southern Yakoma neighbourhoods of the city and more than 90 people, mostly Yakomas, are reportedly held in custody.

Tens of thousands of mostly Yakoma civilians fled the city as violence escalated during and after the failed coup, fearing reprisals from forces loyal to the government. Some crossed the Oubangui River into the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo and others remain outside Bangui. On 17 July, the government has closed its border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, without giving any official reason for this decision. Hundreds civilians, mostly from the Yakoma ethnic group, have fled to the north of the Republic of the Congo, (Congo Brazzaville). Most of the refugees are without basic humanitarian assistance and are at risk of malnutrition and exposure.

The Government has acknowledged that human rights violations have taken place but has said that they have been carried out by uncontrollable members of the security forces.

"The Government should issue strict orders prohibiting further human rights abuses, including extrajudicial executions. It should ensure a strict chain of command among its forces and immediately disband all unofficial armed groups. It should also ensure that an independent inquiry promptly and impartially investigate all reports of unlawful killings and other human rights violations. Those responsible for human rights violations, as well as those charged with involvement in the alleged coup attempt, should be brought to justice according to international standards for fair trial and without recourse to the death penalty," Amnesty International added.

Amnesty International also advocates that those detained solely on account of their ethnic identity should be immediately released, and others detained on suspicion of using or advocating violence should be released if they are not to be promptly charged and fairly tried. The government should also take immediate steps to guarantee their safety.

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