

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 24/003/2004

UA 116/04
2004

Torture/Health concern/Fear for Safety

19 March

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Nick du Toit (m), South African citizen
N.G. "Bones" Boonzaaier (m), South African citizen
At least 12 other foreign nationals accused of plotting a coup d'état

Weja Chicampo, leader of the the *Movimiento para la Auto-determinación de la Isla de Bioko* (MAIB), Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island

A group of alleged mercenaries, including the two South Africans named above, were arrested on 9 March and are now held incommunicado in the capital, Malabo. Some or all have reportedly been severely tortured, and one of them has died, apparently as a result. Torture is a routine practice in Equatorial Guinea. The authorities say the men will be tried on charges which carry the death penalty.

Fifteen men were arrested on 9 March in Malabo and accused of plotting a coup against President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. According to the authorities, the group, whose names have not yet been disclosed, was made up of white South Africans, black South Africans of Angolan origin, a German and others from Kazakhstan and Armenia. Some of the South Africans are reported to have had links with covert forces of the South African military during the 1980s and subsequently with business companies providing security services. At least one of the South Africans, Nick du Toit, operated a registered business company in Equatorial Guinea.

They are held in Black Beach prison, in Malabo. The day after their arrest, one of them, Nick du Toit, presented as the leader of this group, reportedly said on national television that their mission was to abduct President Obiang, force him into exile in Spain and replace him with opposition leader Severo Moto, now in exile in Spain.

German national Gerhard Eugen Nershz died on 17 March. The authorities said he had died of "cerebral malaria with complications". He was transported to hospital from the prison some hours before his death and people who saw him reported that he appeared to have severe injuries caused by torture on his hands and feet. Another detainee, "Bones" Boonzaaier, who was already ill before he was arrested, was denied any medical treatment at least until a South African delegation met the detainees on 18 March.

Weja Chicampo, leader of the *Movimiento para la Auto-determinación de la Isla de Bioko* (MAIB), Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island, was arrested on 4 March and is now held in Black Beach. It is not known why he was arrested, but since the beginning of March the authorities have been cracking down on political opponents and foreign residents. The MAIB, founded in November 1993 to campaign for the independence of Bioko Island, is widely supported by the Bubi ethnic group and since its creation, hundreds of Bubis have been arrested on suspicion of supporting or belonging to the MAIB. Weja Chicampo has reportedly been severely tortured and denied food brought by his family. He has not been seen outside his cell, and Amnesty International fears that his life is in danger.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The authorities claim that this group of alleged mercenaries was an advance party for a group of 64 suspected mercenaries detained by the Zimbabwean authorities on 7 March when their cargo plane landed in the capital, Harare. The Zimbabwean authorities have arrested these men and six others and charged them with a variety of offences including breaches of immigration and firearms legislation.

An opposition party in Equatorial Guinea questioned the reality of this alleged coup, stressing that the authorities had "invented" coups in the past in order to clamp down on any opposition. In 2002 more than 60 people were convicted of "attacking state security" and attempting to overthrow the government, on the basis of confessions extracted under torture after an unfair trial.

Although Amnesty International does not condone the activities of mercenaries, anyone arrested on suspicion of involvement in such activities has the right not to be subjected to torture and the right to a fair trial.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- expressing concern that the 15 foreign nationals arrested on 9 March in Malabo have reportedly been tortured in custody, and one has died, reportedly as a result of torture;
- urging the authorities to improve conditions in the prison and stop torturing the detainees;
- urging the authorities to provide all prisoners with enough food and water and adequate medical treatment;
- urging the authorities to end the incommunicado detention of Weja Chicampo and provide him immediately with adequate medical care and food and water;
- calling for an independent enquiry into the death of Gerhard Eugen Nershez, and for anyone found to have tortured him to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic

General Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo
Gabinete del Presidente de la República
Malabo

República de Guinea Ecuatorial

Telegrams: Presidente de la República, Malabo, República de Guinea Ecuatorial

Fax: + 240 09 3313 / 3334

Salutation: Excelencia/ Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Rubén Mayé Nsue Mangué
Ministerio de Justicia y Culto
Malabo

República de Guinea Ecuatorial

Telegrams: Ministro de Justicia y Culto, Malabo, República de Guinea Ecuatorial

Fax: + 240 09 2115

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/ Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Pastor Micha Ondo Bile
Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores
Malabo

República de Guinea Ecuatorial

Fax: + 240 09 3132/2320

and to diplomatic representatives of Equatorial Guinea accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 April 2004.