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## **Equatorial Guinea: At least 71 opposition party activists arrested since July as peaceful political activities are suppressed**

At least 71 opposition party activists were arrested between July and October bringing the total arrested this year to more than 120, Amnesty International said today as it called on the Government of Equatorial Guinea to release unconditionally all those arrested for their peaceful political activities.

The activists were held for short periods without charge or trial and many were tortured. Most if not all those detained were arrested for their peaceful party activities, some for organizing a non-authorized meeting, others for criticizing the government or for being members of parties which have not been legalized. Many appear to have been ill-treated in order to force them to pay heavy fines or to join the ruling *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE), Equatorial Guinea Democratic Party.

“This pattern of arrests and ill-treatment clearly demonstrates that five years after the end of one-party rule in 1992 peaceful political activities are still obstructed in Equatorial Guinea,” Amnesty International said, pointing out that the arrests have increased since July 1997.

A number of opposition activists remain in detention. Two members of the not yet legalized opposition party *Fuerza Demócrata Republicana* (FDR), Republican Democratic Force, Sinecio Nguia Esono and Francisco Abeso Mba have been detained in Bata, the capital of the mainland region of Río Muni since 26 August 1997. Both were held for three weeks in a container in the Bata harbour where they were severely beaten.

On 15 September, several members of the *Convergencia para la Democracia Social* (CDPS), Convergence for Social Democracy, including six women were held in Akurenam because they were preparing to welcome their leaders with songs. The women were stripped and severely beaten. They were not tried but were told to pay heavy ‘fines’ before they could be set free.

At least two members of a third opposition party, the *Partido del Progreso* (PP), Progress Party, José Eakang Nangomo and Francisco Edù are also still detained in Bata. They were arrested in July 1997 and severely tortured after the discovery two months earlier of an alleged plot by the PP leader, Severo Moto, to overthrow the government. Severo Moto was tried in absentia in August and sentenced to 101 years’ imprisonment on charges of plotting against the government and attempting to kill the president of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. The authorities also announced that they were going to ban the PP and then arrested scores of members, none of whom have been charged with any offence.

Against the background of these repeated human rights violations, Amnesty International deeply regrets that one of its staff members, who was due to take part in a research mission in Equatorial Guinea in September, was refused access to the country by the authorities.

“This ban contradicts the policy of openness relating to human rights issues promised in a public statement by President Obiang in February 1997,” Amnesty International said. “By denying one of our mission delegates access to Equatorial Guinea, the authorities are trying to hide information on the massive human rights violations committed by the security forces. We strongly protest against this decision.”

Amnesty International is again calling on the Government of Equatorial Guinea to release unconditionally all those arrested for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and association, to take immediate measures to put an end to torture and bring to trial all those responsible for these human rights violations.

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