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Equatorial Guinea: Continuing harassment of political opponents

Harassment of political opponents to the government of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo continues to be widespread in Equatorial Guinea, Amnesty International said today.

Three opposition party activists arrested in June -- Mariano Oyono Ndong, Carmelo Biko Nguema and Antonio Engonga Bibang -- remain in Bata prison without charge or trial, following a crackdown on peaceful political activists which has seen at least 90 opposition party activists detained for short periods since the beginning of the year.

"President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo must immediately and unconditionally release all peaceful political activists that remain in detention," Amnesty International said. "They are prisoners of conscience who should never have been arrested and detained."

The three men -- members of the not yet legalized *Fuerza Demócrata Republicana* (FDR), Republican Democratic Force -- were detained in Mongomo, the hometown of President Teodoro Obiang, apparently for holding an unauthorised meeting.

Short term detention, torture and ill-treatment and physical threats are routinely used to intimidate peaceful political opponents. Such harassment reached its climax during the electoral period that preceded and followed the March legislative elections. Many opposition candidates were arrested or confined to their villages

In September, one of the leaders of the opposition, Plácido Mikó, the CPDS Secretary General, was detained for one week. The security forces seized his personal computer and apparently tried to implicate him in a coup attempt. He was released without charge but is since obliged to present himself every fortnight before a military jurisdiction.

"Despite the fact that the government ended one-party rule in 1992, the local authorities still do not tolerate dissent," the human rights organization said. "This constant harassment makes it increasingly difficult for the opposition parties to organize peaceful political activities."

Amnesty International also remains very concerned about the appalling prison conditions in which the 80 members of the Bubi ethnic group continue to be held after being sentenced in June 1998 by a military court after an unfair trial.

"Many of these prisoners appear to be prisoners of conscience, arrested solely on account of their ethnic origin."

Prisoners are held in overcrowded cells in Malabo, the capital, on Bioko Island. Eleven prisoners, whose death sentences were commuted, continue to be held incommunicado and at least two are not receiving the medical treatment they need.

On 20 October 1999 a detainee, Digno Sepa Tobachi, "Elako", died as a result of torture and lack of medical care.

"Several other prisoners -- including Emilio Ribas Esado who is suffering from an inflammation of the testicles -- could die in the coming weeks if they do not receive adequate medical treatment," the organization warned.

Amnesty International calls for the release of all prisoners of conscience and urges the government to improve the prison conditions of these prisoners and allow international humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, access to them.

Background

The March legislative elections, which were marred by massive fraud, were won by the ruling *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE), Equatorial Guinea Democratic Party. However, the two main opposition parties, the *Convergencia para la Democracia Social* (CPDS), Convergence for Social Democracy and the *Unión Popular*, Popular Union, challenged the results and refused to sit in Parliament.

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