

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 25/95 Fear for Safety / Fear of Ill-treatment

31 January 1995

GABON Illegal Immigrants Remaining in Gabon after 15 February 1995

Following a request by the Gabonese authorities for illegal immigrants either to leave the country or legalize their situation by 15 February 1995, there is concern for the safety of hundreds of foreign nationals who remain in the country.

After the deadline of 15 February, illegal immigrants may be detained en masse and Amnesty International fears that they might be held in life-threatening conditions which may amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

There is also concern for any immigrants who are not detained after the deadline. The *Association des Jeunes Chômeurs de Libreville*, Association of Young Unemployed of Libreville, has reportedly threatened to 'kill and burn' illegal immigrants who remain in Gabon after the deadline.

Amnesty International therefore seeks assurance from the authorities that illegal immigrants are not subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and are given protection from attack.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In an attempt to reduce its population of West African immigrants, the Gabonese government had given foreigners until 31 January 1995 to either leave the country or legalize their situation, by obtaining a costly residence permit. As a result, thousands of immigrants, mostly from West African countries, have left the country in the last few days. Two days before the initial deadline, the authorities extended the deadline to 15 February. Gabon has an estimated 75,000 foreign workers out of a total population of 1.2 million.

On 3 February 1995, it will be one year ago since 67 detainees, all foreign nationals from West Africa, died from suffocation in the Gros Bouquet Gendarmerie detention centre in the capital, Libreville. While awaiting deportation, they were held with over 200 others in one cell and apparently died from suffocation. The authorities, however, failed to set up an independent and impartial inquiry to identify those responsible and bring them to justice. To Amnesty International's knowledge, they have also failed to take any measures which would prevent the recurrence of such an incident.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in French or in your own language:

- seeking assurances that any detained immigrants are not subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment;
- calling upon the authorities publicly to condemn threats to kill all remaining immigrants and to provide protection to immigrants under threat;
- referring to the anniversary of the death of 67 detainees on 3 February 1994, and calling for an independent and impartial public inquiry to be carried out into those deaths, which should also make recommendations on improving prison conditions.

APPEALS TO:

1) Son Excellence
Monsieur El-Hadji Omar BONGO
Président de la République
La Présidence
BP 546
Libreville
République du Gabon
Telegrams: Président El-Hadji Omar BONGO, Libreville, Gabon
Telexes: 5211
Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République

2) Général Albert N'DJAVE-N'DJOYE
Ministre délégué chargé des droits de l'homme
Ministère de la Culture, des Arts, de l'Education Populaire
et des Droits de l'Homme
Libreville
République du Gabon
Telegrams: Général Albert N'DJAVE-N'DJOYE, Libreville, Gabon
Faxes: + 241 72 81 63
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

3) Général Idriss NGARI
Ministre de la Défense Nationale, de la Sécurité et de
l'Immigration
Ministère de la Défense Nationale
Libreville
République du Gabon
Telegrams: Général Idriss NGARI, Libreville, Gabon
Telexes: 5453
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: diplomatic representatives of
Gabon accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 March 1995.