

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AFR 31/01/94
Distr: UA/SC

UA 191/94 Legal concern / Fear of ill-treatment

18 May 1994

COTE D'IVOIRE: Guirao Blé, deputy secretary general of the *Fédération
estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI)*,
Ivoirian Federation of Student and School Pupils

and at least 15 other FESCI members including:

Rosalie Kouamé
Danthe Apolos
Naminata Ouatarra
Meite Nalansana
Orabera Tate

Up to 30 student members of FESCI were arrested on 15 May 1994 when a peaceful meeting on the campus of the University of Cocody in the capital, Abidjan, was broken up by the security forces. At least 16 students, including those named above, are reportedly still held in incommunicado detention; some of them are believed to be detained at the police academy near the University of Cocody. According to reports, at least one of the students was severely beaten at the time of his arrest and is said to have lost consciousness. He was taken to hospital in Cocody, Abidjan, where he is reportedly still held.

Amnesty International fears that all the detainees are at serious risk of ill-treatment during this period of incommunicado detention. Most or all of those detained appear to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned because of their membership of the FESCI, an organization which the government claims has been outlawed.

Since the arrest of these students on 15 May, the security forces have reportedly been searching for a number of other FESCI leaders who are currently in hiding.

The Ivoirian government is reported to have launched a crackdown on the activities of the FESCI in recent months. In a televised statement on 10 May 1994, the Minister of Higher Education apparently accused FESCI activists of terrorizing ordinary citizens and said that the FESCI was in league with the opposition. The Minister claimed that the FESCI was officially banned in 1991.

However, it is unclear whether there is a legal statute banning the FESCI or whether the ban was only mentioned in verbal statements by the authorities.

Despite the alleged ban, the FESCI was allowed to hold numerous public meetings in 1993 and to participate in official negotiations with the government.

FESCI activists have been arrested on several occasions in the past. In March 1994 the police arrested several FESCI members after a demonstration that became violent on the campus of the University of Bouaké (290 km north of Abidjan).

One FESCI activist, Eugène Gonthy, was subsequently tried on charges of assault and wilful destruction of public property and sentenced to one year's imprisonment on 29 March 1994. It appears that the prosecution was unable to provide any evidence to demonstrate his personal involvement in any acts of violence and Amnesty International believes that he may be a prisoner of conscience, convicted solely because of his FESCI activities. At least five other students arrested with Eugène Gonthy remain in detention without charge or trial in Bouaké.

The imprisonment of Eugène Gonthy provoked a huge wave of protest at the University of Cocody in Abidjan where students went on strike to call for his

release and for improvements in their conditions, including the payment of grants and regulation of transport facilities. These disturbances led to the arrest of more than two hundred students on 9 and 11 May 1994, almost all of whom were released shortly afterwards, apparently because they were not FESCI members. It has been alleged that the government is exploiting current student unrest as a pretext to dismantle the FESCI and arrest its leaders. Amnesty International considers that the arbitrary arrest and detention of FESCI members who have not used or advocated violence is an abuse of the internationally-recognized rights of freedom of association and expression and that those arrested in such circumstances are prisoners of conscience.

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

- expressing concern that at least 16 student members of the *Fédération estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire* (FESCI) arrested on 15 May, including Guirao Blé, Rosalie Kouamé, Danthe Apolos, Naminata Ouatarra, Meite Nalansana and Orabera Tate, are being held in incommunicado detention in Abidjan;
- expressing particular concern at reports that one of the students was severely beaten at the time of his arrest, and seeking assurances that the other detainees will not be ill-treated;
- urging that the detainees be allowed immediate access to legal representatives, their families and, if necessary, medical treatment;
- expressing concern that some or all of the students arrested may be prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their non-violent political activities and urging the authorities to release them if they are not to be charged with recognizably criminal offences and given a prompt and fair trial.

APPEALS TO

1. President

Son Excellence

Henri Konan Bedié

Président de la République

La Présidence, Boulevard Clozel, Abidjan

République de Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: Président Bedié, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Telexes: 23754 PRESID CI or 23169 PRELIT CI

Salutation: Monsieur le Président/Dear President

2. Prime Minister

M. Daniel Kablan Duncan

Premier Ministre

Le Primature, Abidjan

République de Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: Premier Ministre, Abidjan, Côte

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre/Dear Prime Minister

3. Minister of Justice

M. Faustin Kouamé

Ministre de la Justice

Ministère de la Justice

Boulevard Angoulvant, BP V107, Abidjan

République de Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Telexes: 23752 MINAFET CI (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

4. Minister of Interior

M. Emile-Constant Bombet

Ministre de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité

Ministère de l'Intérieure et de la Sécurité

Boulevard Angoulvant, Abidjan

République de Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: Ministre Intérieur, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

M. Saliou Touré

Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur

Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur

Abidjan, République de Côte d'Ivoire

and to diplomatic representatives of Côte d'Ivoire accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 June 1994.