

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI index: AFR 57/002/2013
15 May 2013

Togo: Excessive use of force and death in custody

Denial or delay to provide health care puts at risk the life of political opponents currently detained in Togo. The lack of access to health care in due time is all the more concerning that detainees are victims of poor prison conditions that may weaken or deteriorate their health.

On 10 May 2013, similar lack of access to health care caused the death of Etienne Yakanou Kodjo, a member of the opposition party, the National Alliance for Change, who was detained in the capital, Lome, relating to the case of the fires which destroyed the Kara market and the main building of Lome's principal market, on 3 and 12 January 2013.

While the detainee's relatives say they asked the Prosecutor, as of 6 May 2013, for Etienne Yakanou Kodjo to be seen by a doctor, the detainee had to wait another five days before being sent to the medical centre of the Camp of the National Gendarmerie where he was held.

Prior to giving a treatment to the patient, the nurse asked him for money so he could receive medical care. The detainee gave the nurse 10,000 F CFA (around 15 Euros). He was put on a drip. A moment later, as his state was deteriorating, his wife sought help towards the medical staff. It was only half an hour later that the decision was made to evacuate him towards the University hospital (CHU). Etienne Yakanou Kodjo died while being transferred to the hospital.

In a press statement dated of 11 May 2013, the Prosecutor gave a very different version of the facts, and affirmed that the detainee did receive an appropriate treatment following a malaria crisis. The Prosecutor also stated that the detainee arrived alive at the hospital and that 'his death occurred before he was taken care of'.

Amnesty International (AI) is also concerned by the health of other detainees, including Mohamed Loud, currently held at the Lome's prison, also for the case of the January 2013 fires. He told an AI's delegation who met him recently that he used to faint since he was beaten up during his detention at the gendarmerie in order to extract him confessions against some opposition leaders. Since then, he would not have received any medical care despite the fact that he would spit blood.

Amnesty International has constantly expressed concern regarding prison conditions and lack of access to health care in Togo, and has regularly condemned it without the Togolese authorities taking appropriate measures to address such situation so their detention system meet with international standards.

Hence, Amnesty International is preoccupied by the recent escalation in the repression against political opponents or persons demonstrating dissatisfaction with the government's policies. On 15 April 2012, security forces shot live bullets on a crowd of demonstrators in Dapaong in the north of the country, and killed a 12-year old child, Anselme Sinadare

Gouyano, who died after being shot in the chest. Those persons were demonstrating in the context of a 72-hours strike engaged by civil servants and coordinated by the Togolese Workers Synergy (STT).

During another demonstration in Dapaong the following day, the police station, the city hall's offices and several cars were burned down. Some members of the security forces were also seriously injured during the protest. A 22 year old student, Douti Sinanlengue is said to have been beaten up by police forces which were on the site of the protest. He died the day after. While Togolese authorities have acknowledged that security forces were responsible for the death of the 12-years old child, they considered that Douti Sinanlengue did not die after being beaten up, but because of an acute peritonitis. An Amnesty International's delegation recently went to Dapaong and was able to obtain information from a medical source which indicated that 'only a traumatism against the abdominal wall could cause such intestinal lesions'.

Amnesty International calls on the Togolese authorities to open an independent inquiry on the death of Etienne Yakanou Kodjo to determine the reasons why he did not receive appropriate medical treatment on time. The authorities have to provide appropriate medical care with no delay in accordance with international standards on detention. Should they fail to do so, some detainees' health risks deteriorating seriously and others may die.

The authorities should also open an independent investigation into the resort to lethal force against demonstrators in Dapaong, which killed two persons, and give security forces clear instructions to prevent any further excessive use of force and other human rights violations.

While Togo is going through a period of political uncertainty after the legislative elections originally planned for March 2013 were postponed for 'technical reasons', the authorities should imperatively send a clear message to the population showing the government's willingness to ensure the rule of law and the right to protest in a peaceful manner.