

EXTRA 163/97

Torture / Medical concern / Fear of torture
Prisoners of conscience

27 November 1997

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO Leading members of the *Forces du Futur*:

Zahidi Arthur Ngoma
Ingele Ifoto
Elia Ona Bobo
Justin Kapempe
Kalinga Metre
Jean Pierre Ngoma
Rene Ndjoli Ngoma
Jospeh Ngoma
Jean Marie Lukundji
Marcel Ngoy Wa Ngoyi
Atoba John

Eleven leaders of a political movement known as the *Forces du futur*, Forces of the Future, were arrested on 25 November 1997 while holding a meeting in the capital, Kinshasa. All 11 have been tortured or ill-treated and are being denied access to medical care for their injuries. They are currently being held by the *Police d'Intervention Rapide* (PRI), Rapid Intervention Police, at the Gendarmerie headquarters known as the *Circo* (*Circonscription militaire*) in Kinshasa. They are feared to be at risk of further torture and ill-treatment.

On 24 November the *Forces du futur* began a four-day meeting in a hotel in Kinshasa. The following day, the PRI surrounded the hotel and prevented participants from entering the building. At 3pm on the same day, the organisers held a press conference at the house of the president of *Forces du Futur*, Professor Zahidi Arthur Ngoma, to protest against the disruption of their meeting. After the press conference, the PRI surrounded the neighbourhood, broke into Professor Ngoma's house and arrested 12 people, among them Professor Ngoma himself. The police also arrested about 10 journalists who had just left Professor Ngoma's house, as well as two bystanders.

The PRI took those arrested to the *Circo* detention centre where they were all beaten; some of them were beaten on their stomach and genitals, a form of torture frequently used by the current security forces. The journalists and three other detainees were released on the evening of 25 November, but 11 members of the executive committee of *Forces du futur*, named above, remain in custody. They have all sustained injuries from the beatings, and are being denied access to a doctor. Ingele Ifot and Elia Ona Bobo are reportedly discharging blood in their urine, and one of the other detainees has a serious eye injury.

No official charges are known to have brought against those arrested. Members of the PRI told the detainees that they were arrested because of their political activities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hundreds of people are reported to have been arrested in various parts of the DRC since the AFDL took power on 17 May 1997. The vast majority of these arrests are reported to be arbitrary, carried out without arrest warrants, by soldiers who do not have the legal power to make arrests under Congolese law. Detainees are often held incommunicado, sometimes in unofficial detention centres such as private residences. Reports of ill-treatment and torture are common.

Those arrested have included members of political opposition groups critical of the AFDL, journalists, human rights activists as well as many dignitaries, including ministers of the former government. The *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL) have officially banned political party activity outside of the AFDL and suspended the Zaïrian constitution which guaranteed freedom of association and the right to hold peaceful demonstrations.

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

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Zahidi Arthur Ngoma and 10 other leading members of *Forces du Futur*, detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association;
- calling for a prompt investigation into the torture and ill-treatment of the 20 people arrested on 25 November, and to bring those responsible to justice;
- urging that immediate steps be taken to ensure that they will not be subjected to further ill-treatment or torture;
- urging that they be allowed immediate and full access medical care, legal counsel and their families;

if possible, also:

- remind the DRC government of its legal obligation under the African Charter for Human and People's Rights to protect freedom of expression and association;
- call for immediate steps to end the current trend of arbitrary arrests by taking action within the law against military or civilian authorities who arrest and detain people without the legal authority to do so.

APPEALS TO:

We are currently unable to obtain fax numbers for the DRC authorities. Therefore, please send equal numbers of appeals to (1) the authorities listed below and (2) to the diplomatic representatives of DRC in your country, asking them, as a matter of urgency, to forward your appeal on to the authorities in DRC

President

Son Excellence Laurent-Désiré KABILA
Président de la République
Présidence de la République
Kinshasa-Ngaliema
Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: President Kabila, Kinshasa DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République

Minister of Justice

M. Célestin LWANGI
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
BP 3137, Kinshasa-Gombe
Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Kinshasa, DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

Minister of Foreign Affairs

M. Bizima KARAHA
Ministère des Affaires étrangères
BP 7100

Kinshasa-Gombe

République Démocratique du Congo

Telegrams: Ministre Affaires Etrangères, Kinshasa, DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES TO:

Le Phare (independent newspaper), Fax: 001/212/3769270 (this is a number in the United States but the fax will be transmitted to *Le Phare*)

and to diplomatic representatives of the Democratic Republic of Congo accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 December 1997.