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Amnesty International delegation prevented from entering Togo after President Eyadéma cancels meeting with Secretary General

Please note: An Amnesty International press briefing will take place at The National Teachers' Hall, in Accra, Ghana, at approximately 1600 hrs GMT (5pm London time) on 21 May.

A delegation of Amnesty International, led by Secretary General Pierre Sané, was this morning prevented from entering Lomé in Togo by the Togolese authorities. The four-member delegation, who had received visas from Togo prior to their journey, requested a meeting with President Eyadéma to talk about the human rights situation in the country. They were travelling from Accra in Ghana.

“I regret that Amnesty International did not have the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with the authorities about the human rights situation in Togo,” Secretary General Pierre Sané said in a statement released this afternoon in Accra.

The organization regrets that the delegation was not able to meet with diplomatic representatives in Togo, as Amnesty International has also been addressing its recommendations about the human rights situation in Togo to the international community.

“I also regret that we did not have the opportunity to meet the families of the victims of human rights violations in Togo and human rights organizations to show solidarity,” Pierre Sané added.

A French television journalist who was trying to film the delegation was briefly detained by the police at the border crossing, who asked him to hand over the video cassette. A number of people with banners hostile to Amnesty International's delegation and the Secretary General gathered in front of the border point where the delegation was being made to wait.

Early this morning, the Togolese ambassador to Ghana called Pierre Sané to inform him that President Eyadéma had decided not to meet him as scheduled. After issuing a letter to the Togolese authorities asking them to rescind their decision, the delegation decided to try to go to Lomé in the hope of meeting the Togolese President.

Background

Early in May 1999, Amnesty International released a report expressing its concerns about the human rights situation in Togo, including hundreds of killings which reportedly took place in the days before and after the June 1998 presidential election.

The Togolese authorities strongly reacted to the report, calling it “a pack of lies” and announcing that they would sue Amnesty International. In connection with the report, two human rights defenders from *L'Association togolaise pour la défense et la promotion des droits de l'homme* (ATDPDH, Togolese Association for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights),

Tengue Nestor and Gayibor François, and a member of Amnesty International's Togolese Section, Nadjombe Antoine Koffi, were arrested. All three were charged with "attack on the credibility and security of the state, spreading false information and using forged documents".

The government has also banned local media for publishing excerpts of the report.

Amnesty International reaffirms its non-political, impartial and independent commitment to the protection of human rights and urges the authorities to release immediately and without conditions the three human rights defenders who have been adopted by the movement as prisoners of conscience.

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