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Togo: a Nigerian member of Amnesty International detained and tortured by the Togolese security forces

Amnesty International has just learned how one of its members from the Nigerian Section was detained, tortured and threatened with execution by Togolese security forces between 19 and 27 May 1999.

Ameen Ayodele was travelling from Ghana to Nigeria via Togo on 19 May. At the border post of Aflao between Ghana and Togo, he presented his Amnesty International membership card to the Togolese security forces as a means of identification, because all his other documents, including passport, had been stolen.

The border police arrested him on suspicion of being “a spy” for Amnesty International in advance of Secretary General Pierre Sané’s scheduled visit to Lomé on 21 May 1999, and which was subsequently cancelled by the Togolese authorities. Ameen was to spend the next 9 days in a confined cell, naked and deprived of food. He was beaten and tortured every day, as the Togolese authorities interrogated him about his involvement with Amnesty International in Togo. He had no information to give them.

“The incident shows once again a pattern of human rights violations by the Togolese authorities who, when faced with criticism about the human rights situation in their country, respond by arresting and torturing people, by installing a reign of terror not only for their nationals but also for foreign nationals travelling in Togo,” Pierre Sané said.

Ameen described how he was woken up at 3 am on his first day of detention and, “as I was coming back from the latrine I was attacked by two police officers and beaten. I was told this is called the morning tea.”

The following day, on Friday 21 May, Ameen was again abused: “I was taken to a room and they started another questioning session. I repeated to the two men in plain clothes who came and fetched me in the cell what I told the chief of police. Then one of them asked if I was a member of the opposition in Nigeria. I told him he would have to define opposition before I can answer that question. Then they asked about the pamphlet I was distributing: I repeated I have no pamphlet for distribution. He then got annoyed and brought out his gun and put it in my mouth threatening to shoot if I did not give him the name of the person I was in liaison with in Togo. I remained resolute and told him I know nobody in Togo. He then told his second that they should shoot me and go. The other one replied that it is better done at night.”

Early the following morning Ameen was taken to a beach next to the border post where they threatened to execute him and dump his body in the sea.

Ameen Ayodele stated that he was abused in such way simply because of his membership of Amnesty International and that he knew nothing of Pierre Sané’s visit to Togo.

Amnesty International is advising its members to be cautious when travelling to and in Togo, as their security cannot be guaranteed by the authorities.

Amnesty International believes that the way Ameen Ayodela was treated at the hands of the Togolese security forces is linked to the controversy surrounding the 5 May 1999 publication of its latest report on Togo.

The Togolese government has reacted angrily to the report calling it “a pack of lies”. Three human rights defenders, including one member of Amnesty International-Togo Section have been arrested for their links with Amnesty International. All three are still in detention. Other human rights defenders have been forced into hiding for fear of arrest.

Amnesty International is asking for the immediate and unconditional released of the three human rights defenders, who have been adopted as prisoners of conscience by the human rights organization.

A High Level Mission, led by Secretary-General Pierre Sané, was prevented from entering Togo on 21 May 1999 and, according to press reports, the Togolese authorities plan to sue Amnesty International over the report, although the human rights organization has not been notified of a formal charge as yet.
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For further details or to arrange an interview, please call the press office: +44 171 413 5831