

PUBLIC

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Fear of torture or ill-treatment/Possible Death Penalty

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR) Claude Yabanda (m), opposition politician**

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Opposition political activist Claude Yabanda who was arrested on 29 April has been ill-treated and is at risk of torture, at a prison near the capital, Bangui. He is reportedly due to go on trial on 6 June, on charges which carry the death penalty. There have been no executions in the CAR since 1981.

Claude Yabanda is a senior member of the socialist opposition political party *Front Patriotique pour le Progrès* (FPP), the Patriotic Front for Progress. He is politically active and his family has connections with members of the former government. The authorities have accused him of collaborating with armed groups trying to overthrow the government of President François Bozizé, and are reported to have charged him with the capital offence of endangering the internal security of the state (*atteinte à la sûreté intérieure de l'Etat*).

He was held at the National Gendarmerie's *Section de Recherches et Investigation* (SRI), Research and Investigation Unit, which is the main interrogation centre for political detainees, until 29 May, when he was taken from his cell at 5am and moved to Ngaragba Prison. On arrival at the prison his head was forcibly shaved with a used razor blade, putting him at risk of infections such as HIV. Conditions at the prison are especially squalid and unhygienic. Prison guards reportedly threatened him with further harsh treatment because the State Prosecutor had written on his case file that he was a "dangerous person" (*élément dangereux*).

On 27 May, Amnesty International delegates visiting the CAR met with Claude Yabanda while he was in custody at the SRI. The detention centre was overcrowded, with poor sanitation and little or no food. Medical treatment was available only if detainees or their families could pay for it. The delegates found a very similar situation at Ngaragba, where detainees were obliged to use drainage channels as toilets, since the purpose-built toilets were blocked. After the delegates had gone, prison staff at Ngaragba reportedly told Claude Yabanda that Amnesty International would not stop them doing whatever they wanted to him.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The chief of the CAR's armed forces, General François Bozizé, seized power in a military coup in 2003, and declared himself president. In May 2005 he won an election that international observers judged to be free and fair. However, since February his government has been cracking down on its opponents, arresting many of them, especially those suspected of links with former President Ange-Félix Patassé and former Defence Minister Jean-Jacques Demafouth. Both these men are living in exile, Patassé in Togo and Demafouth in France, and the government accuses them of leading armed political groups.

Armed groups have been carrying out attacks on government forces since late 2005, led by former members of the armed forces who want to regain the jobs and status they had before President Patassé was overthrown in 2003. Patassé is believed to be behind one of these groups, the *Forces démocratiques pour le peuple centrafricain* (FDPC), Democratic Forces for Central African People.

An armed opposition group attacked a military base in the town of Paoua, in the north-western province of Ouham-Pende, on 29 January. Soldiers, particularly a unit of the elite Republican Guard, responded by killing dozens of unarmed civilians. Journalists who visited Paoua in March reported that those killed included 17 high school students, from Paoua College.

The killings in Ouham-Pende and neighbouring Ouham provinces have forced thousands of civilians to flee to southern Chad. More 10,000 people from the CAR have fled to Chad since the armed groups began operating. Low intensity fighting between armed opposition groups and government forces continues in northern CAR.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English or your own language:**

- expressing concern about reports that Claude Yabanda is to be tried for offences that carry the death penalty, and appears to be a prisoner of conscience held apparently for no reason other than his peaceful opposition activities;
- expressing concern that the prison guards exposed Claude Yabanda to the risk of HIV infection and other serious illnesses when they forcibly shaved his head with a used razor blade on his arrival at Ngaragba prison;
- urging the authorities to ensure that he is not subjected to further ill-treatment or torture, and that he is allowed access to legal counsel and any medical attention he may require;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that conditions at Ngaragba prison are brought into line with international standards for the treatment of detainees, as set out in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which the CAR ratified in 1981.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Paul OTTO

Ministre de la Justice, Garde des sceaux,

Ministère de la Justice, BP: 732, Bangui, Central African Republic

**Fax: +236 61 15 79**

**Email: Paul1otto@yahoo.fr**

**Salutations: Dear Minister/ Monsieur le Ministre**

Minister of Communication, National Reconciliation, Democratic Culture and Human Rights Promotion

Monsieur Jean-Eudes TEYA

Ministre de la Communication, de la Réconciliation nationale, de la Culture Démocratique et de la Promotion des Droits de l'homme

Ministère de la Communication, BP 1290, Bangui, Central African Republic

**Fax: +236 61 59 85**

**Email: jean-eudes@teya.org**

**Salutation: Dear Minister / Monsieur le Ministre**

State Prosecutor

Monsieur Firmin FEINDIRO

Procureur de la République, Parquet du Tribunal de Grande instance

BP 2891, Bangui, Central African Republic

**Fax: +236 61 44 78**

**Email: ffeindiro@yahoo.fr**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Procureur de la République / Dear Procurator**

**COPIES TO:**

Director of Ngaragba prison

Monsieur Wilita ,

Régisseur de la Maison d'arrêt centrale

Maison d'arrêt centrale Ngaragba, Bangui, Central African Republic

and to diplomatic representatives of the Central African Republic accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 July 2006.