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Togo: One year on from the April 2005 bloodshed, there is still complete impunity

A year ago, on 26 April 2005, Faure Gnassingbé was elected President of the Republic of Togo following a presidential election marred by irregularities and violence, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people, mainly unarmed civilians.

Such acts of violence have been made possible by the complete impunity that has been reigning for over thirty years. As long as impunity and disregard for the rule of law are not brought to an end, there can be no lasting peaceful political solution in Togo.

And yet, despite recommendations made by the United Nations and human rights NGOs, no action has so far been taken to identify those responsible for the violence and bring them to justice. In particular, members of the security forces and militia allegedly responsible for such acts, especially extrajudicial executions and torture, have not been punished.

In a report published in August 2005, a United Nations mission reported “the existence of a strategy of repression”, stressing the involvement of the security forces and militia in the acts of violence. The report recommended:

- the establishment of a programme for truth, justice and reconciliation;
- total reorganization of the judicial system;
- the sending a high level (UN/ECOWAS) mission to emphasize the centrality of the human rights issue to the crisis in Togo;
- in-depth reform of the army to make it republican and apolitical.

However, the reforms that are required for the rule of law to be implemented, especially the establishment of a programme for truth, justice and reconciliation and reform of the army, as recommended by the United Nations, have not been started.

The declared willingness of the Togolese Government to launch a reconciliation programme has not resulted in any specific action to ensure that the victims of the 2005 violence receive justice. Quite the contrary. In March 2006, the Togolese Prime Minister, Edem Kodjo, announced that he had “firmly instructed” the police and judicial authorities “to immediately drop any charges already brought or about to be brought against all those allegedly responsible for breaches of law or offences directly linked to the election” with the exception of those suspected of committing murder (“*crimes de sang*”).

A few days later, it was reported in the press that two senior officers from the Togolese Army suspected of having been responsible for committing human rights violations on several occasions in the past had been promoted.

The international community must continue its efforts to get the Togolese Government to honour its commitments and ensure that the victims of the violence receive reparation and that the rule of law is genuinely established.

Signatories:

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