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Equatorial Guinea: Stop the killings, the rapes and the arbitrary arrests

The Government of Equatorial Guinea must immediately bring an end to extrajudicial executions, torture and rape by security personnel, Amnesty International called today.

Following an attack by some individuals on the military garrison on Corisco Island on 29 May 2004, the government unleashed a wave of arrests in Bata, the main city on the mainland. Relatives and associates of those who took part in the Corisco incursion were primarily targeted. People associated with the banned Progress Party of Equatorial Guinea (PPGE), their relatives and friends, were also targeted.

Reports suggest that, after being discovered by soldiers, the attackers dispersed and tried to escape. At least five reportedly succeeded in reaching a boat and fleeing to Libreville. The remainders were hunted down by the soldiers who are reported to have shot them on sight. Those who surrendered were also summarily executed. The executions are reported to have only stopped with the arrival of a high-ranking military officer on the island. Five survivors were arrested and are believed to have been subjected to torture and rape.

The number of people killed is estimated to be between 12 and 16.

After the attack on Corisco Island, the Gabonese security forces rounded up Equatorial Guineans in Libreville, and friends and relatives of those who took part in the attack. An undetermined number were arrested including the suspected leader of the incursion, Adolfo Obiang Bicó. Most detainees appear to have been released within days. However, five people who fled Corisco Island were arrested and "extradited" to Equatorial Guinea. They are believed to be currently held in Black Beach prison in Malabo. Neither the Gabonese nor the Equatorial Guinean authorities have released details about these detainees, their place of detention or the charges against them.

In the absence of an extradition treaty between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, Amnesty International regards such extradition to be illegal and in violation of international human rights law.

Amnesty International further calls on the authorities of Equatorial Guinea to stop the unlawful arrest of relatives of those sought by the security forces who have not committed any criminal offence.

"They should investigate all reports of human rights abuses following the attack on Corisco Island," the organization said.

"Furthermore, they should immediately allow immediate access to all detainees by their lawyers, medical doctors and family. They should launch an urgent, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the killing of alleged attackers on Corisco Island and the deliberate shooting of Marcelino Nguema Esono, a former member of the PPGE, as well as into the numerous reports of torture and rape. The results of such inquiry should be made public." Amnesty International said.

Background

On 30 May 2004, the Equatorial Guinean authorities announced that, the previous night, a group of Equatorial Guineans resident in Libreville had attacked Corisco Island and that the soldiers deployed there had killed five of the attackers and captured five others. Four men and one woman were paraded on national television where they reportedly "confessed" to using Corisco Island as the stepping stone from where to launch attacks on Malabo, the capital on Bioko Island, and Bata, the largest city on the mainland.

In March 2004, Equatorial Guinean authorities accused Severo Moto, the exiled former leader of the PPGE of plotting to overthrow the government with a group of alleged mercenaries who had been arrested in Malabo. Several PPGE members went into hiding to avoid arrest. Their close family members were arrested so as to force them to give themselves up.

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the health and safety of Marcelino Nguema Esono, a member of the PPGE. He was arrested for unknown reasons on the evening of 27 June in the house of his brother-in-law as they were watching football on television. He had been in hiding since March. Armed plainclothes security police burst into the house and deliberately shot at Marcelino Nguema, who was hit in the stomach. The police then took him, his brother-in-law and two others to the main police station in Bata. On 29 June, the four were transferred to Malabo prison where they have had no access to medical treatment or lawyers.

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