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Benin. The presidential candidates must commit to respecting human rights

The candidates in Benin's presidential election, the first round of which is scheduled for this coming 6 March, must commit to promote, respect and protect human rights, a Manifesto published by Amnesty International and the Network of Human Rights NGOs (*Réseau des ONG de Défense des Droits de l'homme* (RODDH)), which groups together some 30 signatory organizations, has stated today.ⁱ

"10 commitments to promote and protect civic space and human rights defenders in Benin" assesses the human rights situation in the country and calls on each of the 33 candidates nominated to commit that they will implement concrete measures aimed at improving this situation, should they be elected. The Manifesto will be submitted to each candidate for signature.

For example, once elected the president will need to ensure that the provisions of the Criminal Code that uphold the death penalty in the country's national legislation are repealed and that the 14 detainees who remain on death row in the country have their sentences commuted.

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly must be protected and the Manifesto also calls on the candidates to commit to actions aimed at banning the use of excessive and arbitrary force by the security forces, particularly during demonstrations. It urges the successful candidate to ensure that independent investigations are conducted in case of excessive or arbitrary use of force and that the alleged perpetrators are brought to justice in a fair trial.

Torture must be criminalized and a mechanism for its prevention established.

All legislative provisions that unduly restrict freedom of expression, such as the criminalization of defamation, offense or insult to the Head of State, must be repealed. The arbitrary arrests of journalists, human rights defenders and political activists must be brought to an end.

Given the ongoing problem of prison overcrowding, a strategy must be developed to replace detention with non-custodial sentences, particularly for minors. Prison conditions must be brought into line with international standards, ensuring sufficient food and water for inmates, and appropriate medical care when they are sick.

The Manifesto reminds candidates of the authorities' responsibility to promote, protect and respect human rights as defined in, among others, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, particularly when they are enshrined in the Constitution of Benin.

Public Document

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¹ Signatory organizations: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2DFeD, ALCRER, ABAEF, WILDAF, ACAT, ANAP, ORDEBOG-AFRIQUE, DEI, L'OEIL D'AUJOURD'HUI, APDH, DAPI-BENIN, FEMME ET VIE, GUEPPE, ASEP-BENIN, FRATERNITE DES PRISONS, DEVELOPPEMENT 2000, REVE DEVELOPPEMENT, DHPD ONG PDDHE-AISOS, GRIDESS, ASPM, QUE CHOISIR BENIN, CEBEDIBA, ESAM-ONG, EIP BENIN, AMAPES, WANJOP-Bénin, DHDD ONG, AFJB.