

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Legal Concern

20 September 1990

CENTRAL AFRICAN : Belibanda, Economics professor and Deputy Dean of Faculty
REPUBLIC of Economics

Simon-Narcisse Bozanga, magistrate and former Prime Minister
Pierre Debato, journalist
Patrice Endjimoungou, teacher and former POC
François Fara-Frond, former Minister of State
Abel Goumba, Professor of Medicine and former POC
Henri Maïdou, former Vice-President
François Pehoua, former Minister and Central Bank director
Aristide Sokambi, businessman
Mbrod Tchakpa, journalist

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The nine people named above are among more than 20 arrested on 12 September 1990 by members of the security forces while meeting at the house of Aristide Sokambi, reportedly to organize a pro-democracy demonstration scheduled for 20 September 1990 in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. They are reported to be held at the Bangui headquarters of the National Gendarmerie on Avenue Nasser. Abel Goumba and Henri Maïdou are reported to have appeared before a magistrate on 15 September but are not known to have been charged with any offence.

Amnesty International is concerned that those arrested are detained because they met to organize a peaceful demonstration and are not known to have used or advocated violence. They appear to be prisoners of conscience and Amnesty International is calling for their immediate and unconditional release. The organization is also concerned that these prisoners, like other political detainees held in the Central African Republic, may be subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment while in custody.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since early 1990 many prominent people including those arrested on 12 September 1990 have made public their demand that a national conference be held to pave the way for multi-party democracy. Only the ruling Rassemblement démocratique centrafricain (RDC), Central African Democratic Alliance, is legal under the terms of the country's 1986 constitution. In May 1990 President André Kolingba rejected the demands. Several people suspected of supporting demands for the national conference were detained for short periods between May and August 1990.

For several months the proponents of the national conference and multi-party democracy have been writing memoranda and "open letters" to the President about their demands. They have formed what is known as a Coordination Committee for the national conference. These latest arrests appear to be a result of the increasing demand for multi-party democracy in the Central African Republic and an escalation of government repression of such demands.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/express and airmail letters in FRENCH, if possible:

- expressing concern at the arrest of more than 20 people, naming some, apparently because they met to organize a peaceful demonstration;

- expressing concern that their arrests appear to be part of official policy to suppress basic human rights, in particular freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly;
- requesting information whether they have been charged with any specific offences;
- pointing out that if they are imprisoned for having held a meeting to discuss peaceful demonstrations then they are considered by Amnesty International to be prisoners of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- seeking assurances that the detainees are not being subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and urging the authorities to bring an end to the ill-treatment of prisoners and allow them access to visits by their relatives, legal counsel and medical care.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence
Général d'Armée André KOLINGBA
Président de la République
Palais de la Renaissance
Bangui
République centrafricaine

Telexes: 5300 PRESICAB RC or 5201 VICEPRE RC
Telegrams: President KOLINGBA, Bangui, RCA

Monsieur le Lieutenant-Colonel Christophe GRELOMBE
Ministre de la Défense
Ministère de la Défense
Bangui
République centrafricaine

Telexes: 5213 DIPLOMA RC (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Telegrams: Ministre GRELOMBE, Bangui, RCA

Monsieur Hughes DOBOZENDI
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice
BP 371
Bangui
République centrafricaine

Telexes: 5213 DIPLOMA RC (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Telegrams: Ministre DOBOZENDI, Bangui, RCA

COPIES TO:

Monsieur Thomas MAPOUKA
Ministre de la Sécurité et de l'Administration du territoire
Ministère de la Sécurité
Bangui
République centrafricaine

Monsieur Laurent GOMINA-PAMPALI
Ministre des Affaires étrangères et de la coopération internationale

Ministère des Affaires étrangères
BP 936
Bangui
République centrafricaine

and to diplomatic representatives of Central African Republic in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 November 1990.