

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 454/91 Extrajudicial executions

19 December 1991

DJIBOUTI 30 or more people (names not yet known) reportedly
killed by the security forces in the Arhiba area of
Djibouti town

On 18 December 1991 the Djibouti security forces (Force nationale de sécurité) are reported to have carried out a series of extrajudicial executions in Arhiba, a poor area of Djibouti town, the capital, which is inhabited mostly by members of the Afar ethnic group. There are reported to have been at least 30 victims, and possibly many more. According to eye-witness reports, the security forces rounded-up over 100 people in searches and identity checks before dawn and then shot people who refused orders to enter trucks to be driven away or who tried to escape. One Afar member of the security forces was apparently executed himself when he refused to fire on fleeing civilians.

The government's account of the incident is that gunmen shot at the security forces during the round-up, killing three of them, and that the security forces returned fire, killing five people and injuring 26.

The incident occurred during increasing tension in the country following the outbreak of fighting in the north in November 1991 between government forces and the Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité et de la Démocratie (FRUD), Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy, an armed opposition group.

It is not known how many people were arrested or what has happened to them. At least two people - Ali Chehem Bourhan and Kassim Haroon - are reported to have been later arrested after the funerals of some of those who were killed.

Dr Abatte Eboh Adou, a medical doctor and former Minister of Health who recently declared that he was a spokesperson for the FRUD, was arrested in the capital the previous day, on 17 December 1991. He had earlier met a visiting French government delegation to discuss the recent crisis. He has now been charged with seeking to overthrow the government (atteinte à la sûreté de l'état) and murder, which are punishable by death.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Opponents of the one-party state of President Hassan Gouled Aptidon's government have been arrested and tortured in recent years (see AI's report, Djibouti: Torture et emprisonnement politique, AFR 23/07/91, 6 November 1991). Opposition comes in particular from members of the Afar ethnic group, who oppose the domination on the government by the Issa clan of the Somali ethnic group. Several Afar opposition members arrested in January 1991, many of whom were tortured, are currently facing capital charges of treason (see UA 305/91 Index AFR 23/06/91 11 September 1991), although their trial scheduled for 21 December 1991 is likely to be postponed.

In November 1991 FRUD forces attacked government military units in Afar areas in the north, including in the towns of Tadjourah and Obock. The government claimed the attacks were launched by Afar militias invading from Ethiopia but FRUD representatives maintained that they are a Djibouti-based opposition organization.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at reports of the extrajudicial executions by the security forces of 30 or more people in the Arhiba area of Djibouti town on 18 December 1991;
- calling for an urgent independent investigation to discover the facts and for any members of the security forces responsible for unlawful killings to be brought to justice;
- requesting that any people arrested in the incident or in connection with it, such as Ali Chehem Bourhan and Kassim Haroon, are treated humanely and are brought before a magistrate without delay and either charged or released.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence Monsieur Hassan Gouled APTIDON
Président de la République
La Présidence
Djibouti, République de Djibouti
Telegrams: President Aptidon, La Presidence, Djibouti
Faxes: + 253 3550 49; + 253 3501 74

[Salutation: Son Excellence/Your Excellency]

Monsieur Ahmed Boulaleh BARREH
Ministre de l'Intérieur
Ministère de l'Intérieur
BP 2086, Djibouti, République de Djibouti
Telegrams: Ministre de l'Interieur Barreh, Djibouti

[Salutation: Ministre/Dear Minister]

Monsieur Ismail Omar Guelle
Directeur de la Service de
Documentation et de la Sécurité
La Présidence
BP 6, Djibouti, République de Djibouti
Telegrams: Directeur Sécurité Guelle

[Salutation: Monsieur/Dear Sir]

Monsieur Ougoureh Hassan IBRAHIM
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
BP 12
Djibouti, République de Djibouti
Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice Ibrahim, Djibouti

[Salutation: Ministre/Dear Minister]

COPIES TO:

Son Excellence Monsieur Barkad Gourad HAMADOU
Premier Ministre
Office du Premier Ministre
BP 2086, Djibouti, République de Djibouti

Monsieur Moumin Bahdon FARAH
Ministre des Affaires Etrangères
Ministère des Affaires Etrangères
BP 1863
Djibouti, République de Djibouti

and to diplomatic representatives of Djibouti in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 January 1992.