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## EQUATORIAL GUINEA Post-election human rights violations

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This brief report updates a report published by Amnesty International in July 1995 entitled *Equatorial Guinea: A dismal record of broken promises* (AI Index: AFR 24/09/95), which describes the use by the Equatorial Guinean government of harassment, imprisonment and ill-treatment as a means of curbing the activities of human rights and political activists. Shortly after the July report was written the Equatorial Guinean government declared an amnesty for a number of political prisoners. Amnesty International welcomes the releases but is concerned by news of further human rights violations leading up to and following Equatorial Guinea's first democratic municipal elections held on 17 September 1995.

The municipal elections, which were monitored by about 27 international observers, including foreign diplomats in the country, were won by the ruling *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE), Equatorial Guinean Democratic Party, led by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema. Opposition parties are contesting the results. The *Plataforma de Oposición Conjunta* (POC), Joint Opposition Platform - a coalition of six opposition parties - claimed overwhelming victory and was supported in this claim by the international observers. Since the elections, hundreds of people suspected of voting for opposition parties have been arrested and one person was killed and several others injured when the security forces opened fire on villagers who were celebrating the victory of local opposition candidates. Scores of government employees have lost their jobs either for voting for opposition parties or for refusing to sign their allegiance to the PDGE.

### **The August 1995 political amnesty**

On 2 August 1995, to mark the 16th anniversary of his accession to power, President Obiang Nguema decreed an amnesty in which 26 political prisoners were released. They had been convicted of attempting to undermine the security of the state in two separate trials. The amnesty

appeared to be in response to strong international pressure on the Equatorial Guinean government including a diplomatic initiative by the Spanish government.

The cases of the 26 political prisoners were described in the Amnesty International report *Equatorial Guinea: A dismal record of broken promises*. **Severo Moto**, president of one of the largest opposition parties in Equatorial Guinea, the *Partido del Progreso* (PP), Progress Party, had been tried in April 1995 and sentenced along with 11 other men PP members and soldiers on a charge of attempting to undermine the security of the state. The men had no access to defence counsel before the trial and were convicted on the basis of statements made under torture. Under similar circumstances 14 men had been imprisoned in July 1994 on the same charge in a trial which became known as the "Kogo case".

Three other people were released a week before the municipal elections. The three, **Weja Chicampo, Aurelio Losoa and Enrique Boneke** - the last two aged in their seventies - had been detained on suspicion of being the leaders of an illegal party, the *Movimiento para la Auto-determinación de la Isla de Bioko* (MAIB), Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island.

#### **Arrests around the time of the elections**

Amnesty International has received reports of over 100 arrests in connection with the municipal elections. At least sixty people were arrested in Malabo, the capital, on or shortly after 17 September 1995 including **Elvira Beheba (f), Jesús Marcial Mba, Dikambo, Eustaquio Alogo Edjang, Juan Esono, Esteban Macoli, Juan Marcos Ndumu, Timoteo Masa Ondó, Idelfonso Ondó, Clemente José Obiang Oyana, Pedro Esono Mba Oyana, María Jesús Oyang (f) and José Antonio Peheo**. They were arrested for a variety of reasons such as encouraging people to vote for opposition parties, or for demanding the use of indelible ink, which had been agreed but which the Interior Minister, on the eve of the elections, declared illegal.

Several members of the Bubi ethnic group, which has been a target for human rights violations by the security forces, were arbitrarily arrested on 14 and 15 September 1995 on Bioko Island. **Fernando Bacaro, Oscar Baita, Gaspar Barila, Claudio Borilo, Copoburú (no other names known), Antonio Pelico, Martín Puye, Serafin Riocaló, Rafael Sipele, and Tarcisio Tray** were arrested for their supposed membership of the MAIB.

All these people were held without charge or trial for several weeks and released in batches during October and November, before the visit to the country of the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Equatorial Guinea. There were reports that most of the detainees were tortured or ill-treated. Apparently, Jesús Marcial Mba was so badly beaten that he was urinating blood and had to be taken to hospital for treatment.

On 11 October 1995 **Felipe Ondo Obiang**, a former parliamentarian, and **Bonifacio Nguema Esono**, a former government minister, were arrested at their homes in Malabo. Following their arrest the two men were reportedly driven by high ranking security officers to Malabo airport and put on a military plane bound for Bata, the capital of the mainland region of Río Muni, where they were held for two weeks. At the time their place of detention was unknown to Amnesty International. The day before their arrest both men had been summoned to the central police station in Malabo where they were asked to sign a paper indicating their agreement with the contents of a document sent to the police by the Minister of the Interior. The

document stated that the two men were involved in activities which endangered national security and that they were to leave Bioko Island within 48 hours. Both men refused to sign.

Felipe Ondo Obiang and Bonifacio Nguema Esono are two of the founder members of the opposition party *Fuerza Demócrata Republicana* (FDR), Republican Democratic Force, created in August 1995 but not yet legalised. Felipe Ondo Obiang was dismissed from his post as president of the *Cámara de Representantes del Pueblo*, Chamber of Peoples' Representatives, the Equatorial Guinean parliament, in November 1994 after he criticised the country's human rights record. Bonifacio Nguema Esono was a minister under the previous government of Francisco Macías Nguema who was overthrown in 1979 by the current President Obiang Nguema.

On 20 October police appeared at the headquarters of the *Convergencia para la Democracia Social* (CPDS), Convergence for Social Democracy, in order to arrest **Plácido Micó**, the party's secretary-general and co-ordinator of the POC, on a charge of defamation of the head of state following statements made to *Radio Exterior de España* in which he accused President Obiang Nguema of being "irresponsible". When police returned with the warrant for his arrest Plácido Micó was no longer on the premises, and police arrested his brother, **Inocencio Micó**, also a CPDS member, in Plácido Micó's place. He was released uncharged a week later.

Until recently there were few details about the situation on the mainland following the elections. However, it has emerged that there, over one hundred people were arrested and that most, if not all were, subjected to torture and ill-treatment. One of those arrested, **Indalecio Eko**, human rights activist and member of the CPDS, was held uncharged for over a week. He was so severely beaten with cables and ropes on the feet and back that he had to be carried back to the cell. After his release he spent several weeks in bed, unable to walk.

### **Shooting of opposition sympathisers by security forces**

In Miboman, a village near Ebebiyín, in the north east of Río Muni, one man was killed on 20 September 1995 when security forces opened fire on villagers who were peacefully celebrating the victory of local opposition candidates of the *Unión Popular* (UP), Popular Union. The dead man was Félix Esono Mba. An undetermined number of people, including Félix Esono Mba's father, Felipe Esono, and his uncle, Juan Abaga, were injured. President Obiang appeared on national television a few days after the incident to make a statement blaming opposition parties for violence which had caused the death. However, there has been no inquiry into the incident to identify those responsible.

### **Other human rights violations**

In another incident not related to the municipal elections, a man died as a result of torture. **Feliciano Boko Beña** was arrested in early December 1995 in Baney, a village about 25 kilometres from Malabo and accused of complicity in a robbery. He was held at the police station there where he was tortured. According to reports, Feliciano Boko Beña was beaten with a rifle butt on the thorax sustaining a broken rib. Apparently, he also had a finger pulled out with pliers and, as a result, he developed septicaemia (blood poisoning) and was taken to hospital in Malabo where he died. As far as Amnesty International is aware, those responsible have not been brought to justice.

Amnesty International remains concerned about the latest upsurge of human rights violations in Equatorial Guinea and calls on the Equatorial Guinean government to seriously consider the recommendations made by the organization in its report of July 1995. It also calls on the UN and governments which have influence on the Equatorial Guinea government to do their utmost to promote protection for human rights in Equatorial Guinea.

**KEYWORDS:** ELECTIONS1 / ARBITRARY ARREST / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT / EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTION / OPPOSITION POLITICIANS / ETHNIC GROUPS / HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS