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Equatorial Guinea: Wave of arrests following government crackdown on opposition party activists

The Government of Equatorial Guinea should act now to release dozens of political party activists rounded up and detained this week and put an immediate end to their torture, Amnesty International said today.

The arrests of party activists have taken place in Bata -- the capital of Equatorial Guinea's mainland province of Río Muni -- since Monday. One of them was Amancio Gabriel Nze, a leading member of the *Convergencia para la Democracia Social* (CPDS), Convergence for Social Democracy. He had been arrested several times on previous occasions for his peaceful party activities. Some of the detainees are said to have been tortured.

"This wave of arrests demonstrates yet again the government's inability to tolerate dissenting views. These people have been imprisoned simply for holding a peaceful meeting or for being suspected of belonging to an opposition party and should never have been arrested in the first place," Amnesty International said.

The government ended one-party rule in 1992 but since then there have been repeated waves of arrests of political activists. In February President Obiang Nguema publicly ordered the security forces not to obstruct peaceful political activities. However, sporadic arrests of political activists continued. The latest sweep began soon after the signing of a new National Pact between the government and most opposition parties in late April.

Those particularly targeted are members of the CPDS and *Fuerza Demócrata Republicana* (FDR), Republican Democratic Force. Both parties had been excluded from the discussions leading to the signing of the National Pact. The government has not yet registered the FDR.

Several suspected members of the FDR were arrested between 30 June and 1 July. They included José Nve Eló Owono and Honorato Manguele Ondo, respectively the son and the brother of Eloy Elo Nvo -- a former Attorney-General and a founder of the FDR. The arrests followed the return of Eloy Elo Nvo to the country after a visit to Spain. The authorities confiscated his passport on arrival.

More than a dozen members of the CPDS were arrested in Bata on 1 July when they were holding a peaceful meeting to discuss party matters.

On 16 June the government announced its decision to "dissolve", by decree the *Partido del Progreso* (PP), Progress Party. This decision followed the discovery in May of an alleged plot by a PP leader to overthrow the government. However, the current wave of arrests seems entirely unconnected with the alleged plot.

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