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Equatorial Guinea: The UN Commission on Human rights must act in the interest of human rights

A pending decision of the 58th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to put an end to the mandate of the Special Representative on Equatorial Guinea is likely to compound the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, Amnesty International said today.

"International monitoring in Equatorial Guinea is essential, especially now when human rights violations are still being perpetrated, including the incommunicado detention for a month of more than fifty suspects who are at risk of being tortured to death", the organization said.

The serious situation of the human rights in Equatorial Guinea had led to the appointment by the UN Commission on Human rights of Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts or Special representatives to that country without interruption since 1979.

In his January 2002 report, presented before the Commission, Mr Gustavo Gallón, the Special Representative of the Commission for Equatorial Guinea stressed that: "The human rights situation in Equatorial Guinea has been a matter of concern to the Commission on Human Rights for longer than that of any other country". He recommended that the situation of human rights in that country "should continue to be monitored in order to ensure the implementation of the recommendations repeatedly made by the Commission over the last 20 years."

The need for ongoing international monitoring has dramatically increased since March 2002 when more than one hundred people, both civilians and military and security personnel, were arrested and are still held in detention, for alleged links with the *Fuerza Democrática Republicana* (FDR), Republican Democratic Force, a not-yet-legalized opposition party. The detainees include two FDR leaders, Felipe Ond\ Obiang, former parliamentarian and Guillermo Nguema Ela, former minister of Finance as well as a pregnant woman and three sons of Felipe Ond\ Obiang, who were apparently arrested only because of their family links with the FDR leader.

Amnesty International has received reliable information from eyewitnesses who saw some of these detainees in prison with visible marks of torture during their first days of detention.

"The fact that the families are being denied access to their relatives and that nobody knows where they are currently being held has led to fears that some of them may already have died under torture. The relatives of the two FDR leaders, Felipe Ond\ Obiang and Guillermo El\ have publicly expressed their fears that these two persons might have killed while in detention," the organization added.

Torture by security forces is routine in Equatorial Guinea and Amnesty International has repeatedly denounced these widespread practices as well as the detention of some 50 members of the Bubi ethnic group sentenced in June 1998 after an unfair military trial. Many of them appear to be prisoners of conscience, arrested solely on account of their ethnic origin.

"The UN Commission on Human rights should make a strong statement in the interest of human rights in Equatorial Guinea by renewing the mandate of the Special Representative to that country. The

international community must not send a signal that it is turning a blind eye to serious human rights violations", the organization said.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>