

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AFR 57/11/93

Distr: UA/SC

UA 298/93

Death in detention/Fear of torture

31 August 1993

TOGO:

Edoh Komi SEWOUL

Daniel OLANDO

Gnato TOYI

Toussaint AGNANKRA

Kassegné ASSOGBA

SYLVAIN (known as "Opérateur")

LASSO

Koudjo SENADE

Nouglozé YOVO

Okoudji AMEDOME

Emmanuel AKAKPO

Anani AKAKPO

Kokou SOSSOU

KOMI (known as "Bombardier")

Maurice NAWONDJE

and at least 4 others

The 15 people named above are among at least 19 people who are reported to have died in custody in Togo following their arrest on 26 August 1993. On 27 August, the Togolese authorities announced that 15 members of an opposition party had died in custody after being poisoned by members of their own party who had it was alleged brought them contaminated food. Other sources have strongly denied this version of events, alleging that the prisoners died of injuries sustained at the time of their arrest, or of asphyxiation when some 40 prisoners were placed in a very small cell. Amnesty International is concerned that at least 20 other prisoners arrested in connection with events in Agbandi, now believed to be detained in Kara, in north Togo, may be at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

Over 40 people from Agbandi and the neighbouring village of Diguine in central Togo were arrested by the security forces on 26 August following violent incidents in Agbandi during polling for the presidential election on 25 August, in which General Gnassingbé Eyadéma was reelected as President. On 25 August, local opposition supporters, angered to discover that some ballot boxes had apparently been filled with ballot papers in favour of President Eyadéma, ransacked voting booths in and around Agbandi. Gendarmes and members of FORS '93, a special security force created in the run-up to the presidential election, were summoned from Sokodé, 70 kilometres north of Agbandi and neighbouring Sotouboua and Blitta to restore order. However, they appear to have used excessive force in the course of their duties.

It seems the prisoners were arrested because they were known or believed to be opposition supporters rather than because there other grounds for suspecting them of having disrupted the election. According to reports, they were beaten at the time of their arrest and taken to the Gendarmerie in Blitta, some 10 kilometres west of Agbandi, where over 40 of them were held in a cell apparently designed to hold five people. In the early hours of 27 August 15 of them were found dead. Their bodies were transferred to the morgue in Sokodé. The other detainees were later transferred to hospital in Sokodé. Four more prisoners have died since then, bringing the total of deaths to at least 19.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Presidential election took place in Togo on 25 August 1993 and President Gnassingbé Eyadéma was returned to power. Legislative elections are due in October. The election was widely criticised as unfair. Gilchrist Olympio, opposition leader and son of Togo's first President, was excluded from standing because his medical certificate was not in order and two other serious contenders withdrew their candidature in protest at the inadequate preparation of electoral lists and the rejection of Gilchrist Olympio's nomination. Observers from the United States and Germany left Togo before the elections took place, protesting that the pre-conditions for a free and fair election had not been met. French and Burkinabé observers continued to observe the procedures although there was some dissent in the French delegation. The French government was the first to recognize the election result, while regretting the low turnout. On election day, the Togolese Minister of Foreign Affairs announced that two people had been arrested because they were planning to overthrow President Eyadéma. The authorities claimed to have found tapes and documents revealing their intention to install an "authoritarian government", but there was no independent evidence to support allegations of a coup attempt.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in French, English or in your own language:

- expressing concern that at least 19 people are reported to have died in custody in Blitta, following their arrest in Agbandi on 26 August 1993;
- acknowledging a government statement of 27 August 1993 that 15 members of an opposition party died in custody after being poisoned by members of their own party, but expressing concern at other reports that the 15 died of injuries sustained at the time of their arrest or of asphyxiation when some 40 prisoners were placed in a very small cell at the Gendarmerie headquarters in Blitta;
- urging that autopsies be carried out as a matter of urgency to establish the cause of death, and calling on the authorities to order an independent and impartial inquiry to establish the cause of these deaths in custody;
- expressing concern that at least 20 others arrested in connection with events at Agbandi on 26 August 1993, and currently believed to be detained in Kara, may be at risk of torture and ill-treatment;
- calling for them to be given access to their families, legal representatives and any necessary medical attention and for them to be released immediately if they are not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO

1) Son Excellence Monsieur le Général Gnassingbé Eyadéma
Président de la République
Palais présidentiel
Avenue de la Marina
Lomé, Togo

Telegrams: Président de la République, Lomé, Togo

Faxes: + 228 21 18 97 ; + 228 21 32 04

Telexes: 5319, 5419, 5201 TMS THG

Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear President

2) Monsieur Georges Combévi Agbodjan
Ministre de l'Administration territoriale et de la Sécurité
Ministère de l'Administration territoriale et de la Sécurité
Rue Albert Sarrault
Lomé, Togo

Telegrams: Ministre Agbodjan, Lomé, Togo

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

3) Monsieur le Commandant Walla
Commandant de la Gendarmerie nationale
Gendarmerie nationale
Lomé, Togo

Telegrams: Monsieur le Commandant Wala, Lomé, Togo
Salutation: Monsieur le Commandant / Dear Commander

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Lieutenant TCHASSAMA
Commandant du poste militaire, Camp militaire
Sokodé Togo

and to diplomatic representatives of Togo accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 October 1993.