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Joint Press Statement from Amnesty International (AI), Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), International Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (FIACAT), Fdration Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture (OMCT), Working Together for Human Rights.

Togo: Time to turn principles into practice

The group of NGOs today calls on the international community to "turn principles into practice", as Mary Robinson highlighted in her opening statement to the UN Commission on Human Rights. The case of Togo, which has systematically violated international human rights standards, will be a test case for whether the Commission on Human Rights can put effective action before political interests.

As the report of the joint UN - OAU Commission of Inquiry for Togo (COI) is about to be discussed at its 57th session, the UN Commission on Human Rights must ensure a full and prompt implementation of their recommendations to address the culture of impunity and provide justice for the victims of grave human rights violations in Togo.

NGOs urge the UN Commission on Human Rights to act upon the key recommendation of the COI: to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Togo. Based on its conclusion that there was "a situation of systematic violations of human rights in Togo", the COI sees a Special Rapporteur as necessary to allow closer cooperation between the UN Commission on Human Rights and the Togolese authorities to better protect human rights in Togo.

The Special Rapporteur should be appointed not only to monitor human rights but also to play an important role of preventing new abuses in the run up to elections later this year. In Togo every election campaign in the last decade has been marred by gross human rights violations.

"The international community cannot continue to evade its responsibility under the name of >Realpolitik=" . The UN Commission on Human Rights would lose credibility if its member states failed to implement the recommendations of a commission that the UN itself decided to establish. "To ignore the UN/OAU recommendations will send a signal to states responsible for human rights violations that they can get away with large scale abuses with the complicity of the international community", the NGOs= spokesperson said*.

The Commission on Human Rights should also ensure that three Special Rapporteurs (on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, on torture and on violence against women) are invited to visit Togo. In doing so, the Commission would implement another important recommendation of the COI. Allegations of extrajudicial executions, torture, "disappearances", arbitrary arrest and rape should be further investigated and those responsible brought to justice as recommended by the Commission.

It is also crucial that the international community provides financial help to the UN High Commissioner to ensure that a mechanism of monitoring and protection of witnesses is set up. Since the COI left Togo in December, at least ten people both in Togo and Benin have been threatened by the Togolese authorities. Some of them had collaborated with the Commission and had to flee their home fearing for their lives. In light of this information and the repeated attempts at intimidation of witnesses by the Togolese authorities, as experienced by the COI itself

during its investigations, the NGOs strongly urges the international community to ensure that the national commission of inquiry announced by the Togolese government on 7 March meets with international standards, including that complainants, witnesses and those conducting the investigation and their families be effectively protected from any form of intimidation. It is also important that any national commission of inquiry is fully resourced, has the power to compel officials to testify, and is composed of members recognized for their competence, independence and impartiality.

NGOs, victims and their families are waiting to see whether the Commission will put UN principles into practice.

Background

The report of the joint OAU/UN Commission of Inquiry on Togo charged with "verifying the truth of allegations of hundreds of extrajudicial executions, which allegedly took place in Togo during 1998, made by Amnesty International's report published on 5 May 1999" was released on 22 February 2001.

The report uncovered evidence of extrajudicial executions carried out by security forces in concert with the police and armed militias. It also reports acts of torture, ill treatment of people in detention as well as rapes of women in the presence of their husbands, perpetrated by armed militias close to the authorities.

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