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TOGO: THE TIME HAS COME TO SEE JUSTICE DONE

*Press Conference statement by
Pierre Sané, Secretary General, Amnesty International*

Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning and welcome.

Amnesty International has decided today to intensify its campaign against impunity in Togo and is launching the following appeal to the international community:

TOGO: THE TIME HAS COME TO SEE JUSTICE DONE.

Seven years ago, on 23 July 1992, Tavio Amorin, member of the High Council of the Republic and Chair of the Political Affairs, Human Rights and Liberty Commission, was shot in the street in Lomé. Two days later, he was evacuated in a critical condition to a Paris hospital where he died four days later at the age of 34, leaving a widow and a son barely a year old.

In Paris the French government deplored the death of Tavio Amorin, condemning the attack and expressing the wish that those responsible be tracked down and brought to justice.

Today, seven years later, nobody has been arrested and Tavio Amarin's family is still waiting for justice to be done. I have therefore sent an open letter to the French President, Mr Jacques Chirac, who will be in Lomé on 23 July. It summarizes the human rights violations committed in Togo over the past 10 years, which have flourished under the rule of impunity.

Indeed, to date, no-one from the Togolese armed forces has been brought to justice for any of the following violations:

- _ 10 April 1991 - Bé lagoon massacre: 28 demonstrators killed by the army.

- _ 8 October 1991 - Attack on the offices of the Prime Minister, Joseph Koffigoh: 5 members of the military victims of extrajudicial killing by the security forces.

- _ 5 May 1992 - Attack on Gilchrist Olympio: 4 people killed by the army.

- _ 19 January 1993 - Lomé Peace March - more than 20 people killed by the army.

- _ 25 March 1993 - Following an attack against the *Régiment interarmes togolais* Togolese Combined Regiment, at least 20 people victims of extrajudicial killing by the army.

- _ 27 August 1993 - The day after the presidential election, 21 of the 40 people arrested the previous evening at Agbandi died in detention at the *gendarmerie* in Blitta.

- _ 6 January 1994 - 48 prisoners, including 36 civilians and 12 members of the military, victims of extrajudicial killing by the army at the barracks of the Togolese Combined Regiment.

- _ 13 February 1994 - Gaston Edeh, member of parliament, kidnapped and killed by the army together with two members of the *Comité d'action pour le renouveau (CAR)* Action Committee for Renewal.

Throughout the years that followed, in addition to these massacres there have been targeted assassinations - Amnesty International has a list of some such cases - and, more recently, hundreds of extrajudicial killings at the time of the 1998 elections.

To date the Togolese authorities have not brought one of those responsible to justice. No-one has been punished for any of these crimes, or for "disappearances", arbitrary arrests or torture.

We say that the time has now come in Togo for those responsible to be brought to justice.

Consequently, this is the first of our appeals. It is addressed to President Jacques Chirac.

The French President should demand that the killers of Taviu Amorin and those who ordered the killing be brought to justice, that the Togolese authorities invite the United Nations Special Rapporteurs to go to Togo in order to carry out their investigations and that the Togolese government put an end to reprisals against, and harassment of, human rights defenders in Togo.

Since the release of Amnesty International's report, "Togo: Rule of terror", for instance, members of Amnesty International have been arrested and tortured.

- As he was returning to Nigeria from Ghana on 19 May, Ameen Ayodele, a member of AI Nigeria, was arrested at the Togolese border and held for more than a week in a tiny cell with neither food nor clothing. He was tortured and beaten daily before being released 9 days later without being charged.
- Previously, on 14 May, Koffi Nadjombe, a philosophy teacher and a member of AI Togo, was arrested together with his wife Micheline. She was released several hours later, but her husband was held for over a month at the civil prison.

- Members of the *Association togolaise pour la promotion et la défense des droits humains*, Togolese Association for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights, were also arrested at the time AI's report was published. They were Nestor Apéda Tengue, François Koko Gaybor and Brice Sant'ana, all charged with "false accusation and defamation" and held for more than a month.
- On 26 May, Arsène Bolouvi and Benjamin Adjoh, two members of the Togolese Section of *l'Action des Chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture*, Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture, narrowly escaped arrest and were obliged to seek refuge abroad.
- Finally, as part of its strategy of intimidation of human rights defenders, the Togolese government pledged to institute proceedings against the Secretary General of AI and proposed to issue an international arrest warrant.

This confirms, if confirmation were needed, the state of utter bankruptcy in Togo. Rather than bringing to justice those responsible for systematic acts of torture and "disappearances" and the perpetrators of hundreds of extrajudicial killings - including hundreds of killings during the 1988 election period - the government attacks organisations whose sole aim is to see the introduction of a state governed by the rule of law in Togo, which respects the rights of all Togolese citizens and meets its international obligations.

There is, however, no evidence to show that a state of this kind, which we are most anxious to see, yet exists in Togo.

Impunity is not a foregone conclusion and this is why we are today appealing to the international community.

This is our second appeal:

We are today calling on all countries that have ratified the United Nations Convention against Torture, and where Togolese officials suspected of crimes of torture and "disappearances" are present, to take steps to bring them to justice.

Over the last 12 months, the international community has shown its determination to put an end to impunity. It adopted the statutes of the International Criminal Court. General Augusto Pinochet was arrested in Great Britain at the request of the Spanish judiciary and Slobodan Milosevic was indicted.

Even here in France, on 3 July 1999 the French judicial authorities decided to indict Ely Ould Dha, an officer in the Mauritanian army, for acts of torture committed in 1990 and 1991 against two Mauritanian citizens in Mauritania.

In Togo, too, it is time for justice to be done and for those Togolese officials responsible for heinous crimes -- made public by Amnesty International and other organizations -- to be brought to justice outside Togo, because the justice system in Togo itself is totally bankrupt.

This is the urgent task to which we must all devote ourselves, so that the families of the victims in Togo can finally know the truth and, together with the family of Tavio Amarin, see justice being done at last.

However, the Togolese people must be prepared to commit themselves if this is to happen.

This is the essence of our third appeal. It is addressed to those Togolese citizens who have been forced to live in exile and who have been the victims of serious human rights violations such as torture.

In France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland or wherever, it is up to the Togolese exile community to compile information about the violations they experienced, to consult with lawyers and lodge complaints against those Togolese officials who have been responsible for acts of torture.

It is up to them to bring to the attention of the judiciary in these countries the information which can be used to institute legal proceedings. In this way, by joining all our efforts, we will be able to put an end to the reign of terror in Togo.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Togolese President Gnassingbé Eyadéma himself declared that 1999 would be the year of human rights. Amnesty International therefore says: In Togo, the time has come to see justice done.

ENDS.../