

## News Flash

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### **Togo: Amnesty International rejects categorically accusations of manipulation**

Amnesty International strongly rejects any suggestion made today by President Chirac that Amnesty International's latest report on human rights violations in Togo is the result of a so-called manipulation.

"Amnesty International is an independent, apolitical organization whose credibility for almost 40 years has been based upon carefully researched documents and a complex internal approval system before documents are made public," the human rights organization said.

Today, on the very day of the 7th anniversary of the cold blooded execution in Lomé of Tavio Amorin, a prominent opposition member and human rights defender, the French President Jacques Chirac said that "Amnesty International's latest report was probably the result of a manipulation", adding that "no direct or indirect testimonies corroborated Amnesty's findings".

On the contrary, independent press reports and the Ligue béninoise des Droits de l'Homme met several witnesses and confirmed the existence of corpses found on the beaches in Togo and Benin.

"Who is being manipulated? There are numerous evidence of extrajudicial killings, 'disappearances', torture coming from various sources, over the past decades in Togo. Instead of helping to put an end to the culture of impunity in

*Togo, the French President is supporting a regime which has never brought to justice those responsible of human rights violations ”, Amnesty International stressed.*

*However, Amnesty International welcomed today the announcement this week by one of the lawyers of the Togolese government that it has agreed to the establishment of an international commission of inquiry on human rights violations in Togo. Amnesty International would particularly welcome a commission established by the United Nations so that the truth may be again brought to light.*

Amnesty International stresses that several criteria be adopted for the constitution of the commission in order for this commission not to become a white wash. They are as follows:

The commission should be independent, impartial and competent;

The commission should be able to investigate for the duration it deems necessary;

The commission should be able to move freely in Togo and in neighbouring countries, including in the areas where Amnesty International has documented serious cases of human rights violations;

The commission should be able to interview whoever it chooses to without pressure being exerted by the Togolese authorities;

Witnesses interviewed by the commission should do so freely without fear of reprisals, intimidation and harassment by the Togolese authorities;

- The commission should investigate all human rights violations perpetrated in Togo in the last decades, including extrajudicial executions, ill-treatment and cases of torture, “disappearances” and prison conditions;
- The findings of the commission should be made public.

“It is only if these conditions are met that the international community and human rights organizations will give credibility to the findings of the commission”, Amnesty International said.

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***For further information or to arrange for an interview, please call the duty press officer on: + 44 7887 690 792***