

TOGO

Time for accountability

Komlan Edoh and Kodjo Kouni: two “disappeared” youths

Komlan Edoh and Kodjo Kouni, two youths aged 18 and 19, “disappeared” in August 1998 after they were arrested by the Togolese security forces. Amnesty International is deeply concerned for the safety and physical well-being of these young people and urges the Togolese government to clarify their fate immediately and bring those responsible to justice.

*On 20 August 1998, Komlan Edoh, a student at Sanguera, and Kodjo Kouni, a painter and decorator, were arrested by the *Forces armées togolaises* (FAT), Togolese armed forces, in the Agbévékopé district of Akato, a village north west of Lomé on the border with Ghana. According to eye witnesses, they were both kicked and beaten by the soldiers using rifle butts and sticks at the time of their arrest. Later the same day they were taken to the military camp at Adidogomé, not far from Akato, where eye witnesses saw them handcuffed in a cell. According to the military authorities, they were subsequently transferred to the gendarmerie in the capital, Lomé. The gendarmerie, however, deny that these two young people were held there.*

The two have not been seen since that date and all attempts to find them have failed. The security forces have given no reason for the arrest of Komlan Edoh and Kodjo Kouni. They have given

conflicting information to the relatives and have intimidated them during their attempts to find the young men.

The families have not lodged a complaint. In fact it is common in Togo for no official complaints to be lodged in cases of "disappearances", extrajudicial executions and torture because of the widespread lack of confidence in the justice system and the climate of impunity which exists.

It is extremely likely that the grounds for the arrest of Komlan Edoh and Kodjo Kouni are political in nature. Amnesty International has investigated several cases of arbitrary arrest, torture and summary execution of citizens of Akato who have been suspected of belonging to armed opposition groups. This village, which has for some years been considered to be an opposition stronghold, has been the subject of numerous attacks by the security forces, during which houses have been destroyed and set alight. The young people of Akato, by the mere fact of their youth, are suspected of being members of the armed opposition and are the specific targets of military or police action.

The "disappearance" of Komlan Edoh and Kodjo Kouni is not an isolated incident. Since 1990, human rights violations committed by the Togolese security forces have increased dramatically. The security forces and, primarily, the armed forces and the gendarmerie have been responsible for extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and arbitrary detentions followed by torture or ill-treatment, all carried out with complete impunity. The victims and their families demand that the truth be revealed and that inquiries and legal proceedings be pursued. To date, the Togolese authorities have done nothing to

throw light on events past or present, nor to bring those responsible to justice.

Recommendations

After more than three decades of human rights abuses, it is time for the Togolese government to be held accountable.

1. Recommendations to the Togolese government

Amnesty International urges the Togolese authorities to:

- 1) immediately reveal the fate of Komlan Edoh and Kodjo Koumi;
- 2) initiate an independent and impartial investigation into other cases where people have "disappeared" and into other violations of human rights in Togo; make public the truth about such activities; bring those responsible before the civil courts; and as a matter of urgency take all necessary steps to put a stop to "disappearances", extrajudicial executions and torture in the country;
- 3) comply with all obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

2. Recommendations to the international community

Amnesty International is also launching an appeal to foreign governments to impress upon the Togolese authorities the need to guarantee respect for human rights, and to conduct independent and impartial investigations into the "disappearance" of Komlan Edoh and Kodjo Koumi and other cases of human rights violations in Togo.

3. Recommended action for the general public

- Write to President Eyadéma [his address: His Excellency General Gnassingbé Eyadéma, Président de la République, Palais Présidentiel, Avenue de la Marina, Lomé, Togo] urging him to set up an independent and impartial enquiry into the "disappearance" of Komlan Edoh and Kodjo Kouni and into other cases of human rights violations. Emphasise that the truth concerning these events must be made public and those responsible brought before the civil courts.

- Write to your government urging it to bring pressure to bear on the Togolese government to pursue independent and impartial inquiries into the "disappearance" of Komlan Edoh and Kodjo Kouni and into other cases of human rights violations in Togo.