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Uganda: Soldiers executed after unfair trial

Amnesty International strongly condemns the execution of three Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) soldiers on Monday.

The executions confirm fears expressed by Amnesty International, following the execution of two other UPDF soldiers in March 2002, that the Ugandan Army has adopted the use of the death penalty as an expedient form of punishment.

"The manner in which these men were tried and the speed with which their executions were carried out, without any possibility of appeal, constitutes a denial of the men's right to a fair and independent judicial process," the organization said.

"These men seem to have been made scapegoats to give the impression that the army deals swiftly with those who have committed crimes."

According to reports, two of the men, Privates Kambacho Ssenyonjo and Alfred Okech, were sentenced after a court martial lasting just two days during which they did not have access to legal representation. Reports suggest the execution was carried out about an hour after the sentences were passed.

"The unfair trial and execution of the soldiers is in violation of Uganda's obligations to observe internationally recognized fair trial standards as contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights," the organization said.

"The failure of the Ugandan Government to prevent unfair trials and executions within the army can only demonstrate, both to the international community and to Ugandans themselves, that the Government is unwilling to respect human rights standards," Amnesty International added.

Background

Pte Richard Wigiri was executed by firing squad on 3 March 2003 in Kitgum Matidi Township, near Kitgum in northern Uganda, after a military court found him guilty of the murder of Monica Achiro, a civilian, in December 2003.

Ptes Kambacho Ssenyonjo and Alfred Okech were executed by firing squad later the same day after a military court near Kitgum found them guilty of killing Charles Labeja, Patrick Olum and Peter Ayela on January 4 2003. Reports suggest at least 200 members of the public witnessed the executions.

Previously, on 25 March 2002 two UPDF soldiers, Cpl James Omedio and Pte Abdullah Muhammed, were executed in public by firing squad after a military court found them guilty of killing the Irish priest Rev. Fr. Declan O'Toole, his driver, Patrick Longoli, and his cook Fidel Longole. It was reported that the court martial lasted only two hours 36 minutes.

Public Document

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