

HAITI

@Torture of Wilcéna Dorléus

A recent testimony made available to Amnesty International highlights the grave situation of torture and ill-treatment to which hundreds of those detained by the security forces in Haiti have been subjected to since the military coup on the night of 29-30 September 1991. The restrictions on public freedom in place in Haiti since the coup have made it extremely dangerous for human rights workers to collect and disseminate information on human rights and many have been threatened and intimidated by members of the security forces. In at least one case known to Amnesty International a human rights worker has been imprisoned for his work in reporting human rights violations outside the country. Problems in communications and the climate of fear and repression in Haiti have meant that many human rights violations, including ill-treatment and torture, remain unreported. Nevertheless Amnesty International has had reports of hundreds of cases throughout the country, where those detained by the armed forces have been subjected to various forms of torture and ill-treatment, including severe beatings and the use of the *djak* - where a baton is wedged under the thighs and over the arms of the victim who is then beaten repeatedly. Many of those tortured and who sustained serious injuries were repeatedly refused medical attention. Several cases of deaths in custody as a result of torture were also reported to the organization.

Wilcéna Dorléus, aged 26, a teacher from Petit-Goâve, was arrested on 24 May 1992, as he was entering the Sylvio Cator Stadium in Port-au-Prince to watch a football match. According to his testimony, Wilcéna Dorléus left Petit-Goâve on the morning of 24 May to go to the stadium and met a friend on the way, who handed him a leaflet. Without reading the leaflet he put it in his pocket and went to the match. The leaflet had a photograph of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and a picture of the Haitian flag. Everyone entering the stadium was searched by a large contingent of uniformed members of the armed forces. It was during the search that the leaflet that Wilcéna Dorléus was carrying in his pocket was discovered and he was immediately arrested. He recounts what happened during his detention:

"They began ill-treating me at the stadium. I was given several blows to the head, stomach, waist and ribs. They put handcuffs on my wrists and took me to the *Caféteria* police station [4th police precinct of Port-au-Prince, known as the *Caféteria*]. I was once again beaten, but this time the beating was more painful. I received blows with the butt of a rifle to my head and several on my wrists. I still suffer from severe pains in my head around the area where I received the blows from the butt of the rifle to my head; that area has become soft to the touch and feels very sensitive. My wrist is still swollen."

"Depuis le stade, ils ont commencé à me maltraiter. J'ai reçu plusieurs coups en particulier à la tête, à l'estomac, à la ceinture et aux côtes. Ils m'ont passé deux menottes au poignet et m'ont conduit au poste de police de la Cafétéria. J'ai été une nouvelle fois battu et cette séance de bastonnade a été encore plus pénible. J'ai reçu un coup de crosse de fusil à la tête et plusieurs au poignet. J'ai encore des douleurs assez fortes à l'endroit où j'ai reçu le coup de crosse à la tête; l'endroit est devenu mou et très sensible. Mon poignet est jusqu'à présent enflé."

According to Wilcéna Dorléus' testimony, on 25 May he was taken upstairs to an office.

"There I was slapped on the face and was beaten about the head. I was beaten with a whip which left lacerations all over my back. One of the soldiers forced my hand on to the ground and then crushed it under his boots".

"Là j'ai reçu plusieurs gifles et encore plusieurs coups à la tête. On m'a battu avec un fouet qui m'a lacéré tout le dos. Un soldat m'a contraint à mettre la main par terre: il l'a écrasée avec ses bottes."

On the morning of 26 May, Wilcéna Dorléus was taken to the National Penitentiary. He said later that once in the National Penitentiary he thought they would stop beating him.

"But I was mistaken. I was again beaten with whips, butts of rifles, particularly on the head and in the ribs."

"Mais j'avais tort. J'ai été encore battu avec des fouets, des crosses de fusils en particulier à la tête et aux côtes."

He reported that he was then taken to a large hall where 300-400 prisoners were kept, along with 11 other prisoners who like him had also been detained on 24 May at the stadium. During the night soldiers called out the names of seven young people among the 11 that had been arrested. One of the seven tried to hide, but was, according to Wilcéna Dorléus, shot through the head in cold blood by one of the soldiers. The other six were taken away, and Wilcéna Dorléus stated that he did not see them again. Amnesty International is endeavouring to discover the fate of these six, whose names are as yet unknown, and the other three remained in the National Penitentiary. So far, no new information has emerged.

Wilcéna Dorléus was released on 5 June after his family, he claimed, paid \$600 (600 Haitian dollars is roughly equivalent to 450 US\$) to a police official from the *Cafétéria* police

station. Following his release Wilcéna Dorléus sought medical assistance for the injuries he sustained as a result of torture in military custody. According to the medical certificate issued by the physician who examined him, a copy of which was made available to Amnesty International, Wilcéna Dorléus suffered a fracture with splintering of bone to his right forearm, two fractures to bones in his right hand, skull trauma and trauma at the front arch of two ribs on the right side of his chest. The certificate stated that these were a result of a beating which had occurred two weeks prior to admission to hospital. According to the medical certificate Wilcéna Dorléus will need an evaluation of his neurological and pulmonary functions in order to determine whether these too had been affected by his ill-treatment in custody.

BACKGROUND

On the night of 29/30 September 1991, a military coup overthrew the democratically elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Since the coup Amnesty International has received reports of grave and systematic human rights violations. Amnesty International's January 1992 report, *The Human Rights Tragedy - Human rights violations since the coup* (AI Index AMR 36/03/92), details the human rights situation following the coup. In March 1992 an Amnesty International delegation visited Haiti and collected first hand evidence of continuing gross human rights violations, including torture, extrajudicial execution and arbitrary and illegal arrest. Those targeted included people involved in popular organization, namely peasants, trade unionists and popular organizers, students, members of the press and the Catholic church, and virtually anyone suspected of supporting the return of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The delegation also found extensive evidence of widespread arbitrary abuse by the security forces against the civilian population, including extortion by members of the armed forces or civilians working with their connivance. The delegation learned of many cases where members of the security forces and those working with them would force people to give them sums of money to prevent them being detained; or if detained, to prevent or reduce the severity of beatings or to secure their release.

During its visit, the Amnesty International delegation met with victims of human rights abuses whose cases the organization had already highlighted, or their relatives; those people internally displaced or in hiding as a result of the coup; members of human rights organizations; the press; religious groups and members of the clergy and lawyers. Amnesty International also met with diplomatic officials, representatives of the armed forces and with the former *de facto* Prime Minister Jean-Jacques Honorat.

The prevailing climate of fear and levels of repression in Haiti made it in many cases impossible for Amnesty International to meet with many victims of human rights violations and their families, either because they had fled their homes and were in hiding, or because they believed it too dangerous to meet a foreign delegation, as they feared it would draw attention to them. During the months of May and June political violence has increased as

students staged demonstrations and protests against the *de facto* government. As a result, repression also increased.

On 19 June, Marc Bazin was sworn in as Haiti's Prime Minister, replacing the provisional Prime Minister Jean-Jacques Honorat. Joseph Nerette, Haiti's president resigned from office after swearing in the Prime Minister. Since Marc Bazin took office, human rights violations continue to be reported.