
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 17/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - ZAIRE

PLEASE NOTE: I have not heard back from most of you about whether you need hotel bookings for the press officers meeting on 19, 20 & 21. I also need to have confirmation that you are coming (even if you don't need hotel bookings), so that I can organize the food for lunch on each day of the meeting. Please send faxes/e-mails or telephone asap to finalize this. Thanks, Paula.

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Burundi - 27 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 05/94
UK - 9 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170
Kuwait - 24 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Zaire - 2 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Women - 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161
Saudi Arabia - 31 March more details to follow
Colombia - 16 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56-57/93
South Africa - 23 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 05/94

News Service 17/94

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ZAIRE: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO URGE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION IN ZAIRE

Amnesty International is calling on the international community to urge the Zairian authorities to ensure that human rights protection is part of any political settlement in Zaire.

Amnesty International made this appeal in a new report on Zaire, published today, entitled Zaire: Collapsing Under Crisis. The report highlights human rights violations which occurred during the last three months of 1993.

Talks between opponents and supporters of President Mobutu Sese Seko aimed at ending the political crisis in Zaire, which has lasted more than three years, have been going on since September 1993. In mid-January an agreement was signed to form a transitional government of national unity. As before, human rights appear to have been left out of the talks and the agreement.

The disregard for fundamental human rights by the authorities and the security forces is largely responsible for the current political crisis. Since President Mobutu announced political reforms in April 1990 he and his supporters have allowed or condoned human rights violations, including thousands of extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings, against political opponents. The security forces perpetrate human rights violations with impunity and there are fears that unless the rule of law is re-established the state could collapse. In September 1993 Zairian Roman Catholic bishops concluded that "pillaging, ethnic conflicts, kidnapping and carnage" are unmistakable signs attesting "madness and moral death of the Zairian state unleashed against its own population".

In the same month Amnesty International published a previous report on Zaire entitled, Violence Against Democracy. In response, President Mobutu's office issued a statement accusing Amnesty International of attempting to destabilise Zaire.

However, the statement failed to address Amnesty International's concern regarding the widespread violations of human rights by the security forces, ordered or condoned by their commanders. The statement did not mention what, if any, measures would be taken to bring an end to the impunity which continues to be enjoyed by the security forces. There was no mention of any official investigation to identify the perpetrators of politically-motivated killings with a view to bringing them to justice, or of any steps being taken to prevent further such killings. To date no-one is known to have been arrested or brought to justice in connection with the violence in several parts of the country.

Félix Mbayi Kalombo, a security advisor to opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, was shot and wounded in the leg in September 1993 by men in civilian clothes thought to be members of the security forces. Two months earlier he had been released without trial from four-months detention as a prisoner of conscience. On 29 November 1993 soldiers from the 223rd battalion in Kananga, the capital of West Kasai region, extrajudicially executed at least six people, when they attacked the Kananga Roman Catholic bishopric. Those killed, including Father Mukoma, were trying to resist looting and destruction of property by the soldiers.

As in late 1992 and early 1993, journalists and members of political parties opposed to President Mobutu continue to be arrested and detained as prisoners of conscience. For example, Ferdinand Chimanuka, a member of the Democratic and Social Christian Party, was arrested on 23 October in Bukavu, South-Kivu region. He was accused of inciting people to reject the new currency introduced a day earlier. He and another detainee - Déo Kambale, a member of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress party in North-Kivu region arrested in November because he was seen reading an opposition newspaper - were released on 8 December 1993 when the Supreme Court

ruled that there were no legal grounds for their continued detention. The fate of dozens of other political detainees, including some 50 soldiers arrested in 1982, has remained unclear.

Kalala Mbenga Kalao, a newspaper editor, was arrested in August 1983 and reportedly subjected to beatings by members of the Garde civile, Civil Guard, because his newspaper published statistics suggesting that 70 per cent of high ranking officers of the security forces belong to the same ethnic group as the President. He was released untried on 21 September.

Amnesty International is urging governments to recommend their representatives in Zaire to visit areas where human rights violations have occurred. Governments should use information obtained by their representatives to condemn human rights violations in Zaire and to put pressure on President Mobutu and others who order or condone these violations to bring them to an end.

Amnesty International is also urging the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which have been trying to help solve the Zairian crisis, to consider appointing official representatives to monitor human rights violations in Zaire. Such representatives could make recommendations to the UN and the OAU and to the Zairian authorities on ways to promote guarantees for the respect of human rights and to ensure that these are built into any political settlement.

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