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Chad: Justice needed for opposition leader who ‘disappeared’ five years ago

The continuing mystery over the fate and whereabouts of opposition politician Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh who was detained five years ago demonstrates the failure of Chad to deliver justice and end impunity, Amnesty International said today.

The leader of the Party for Freedom and Development and chairperson of a coalition of opposition political parties, Ibni Oumar was arrested on 3 February 2008 at his home in the Chadian capital N’Djamena by members of the security services following a failed attack on the city by armed opposition groups. He has not been seen since.

“Little has been done by the Chadian government to get to the bottom of Ibni Oumar’s disappearance. The authorities must urgently disclose his fate and whereabouts and allow his family members to know the truth,” said Christian Mukosa, Amnesty International’s Chad researcher.

“This dehumanizing practice of enforced disappearance which has long-lasting and damaging consequences for both the disappeared person and his or her family is all too frequent in Chad and must cease.”

Following national and international pressure the Chadian government established a National Commission of Inquiry to investigate the human rights violations and abuses that took place between 28 January and 8 February 2008, including the fate of Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh.

The Commission’s report, released in July 2008, confirmed that he was arrested at his home on 3 February at around 19:30 by eight members of the Chadian security forces but the Commission was unable to ascertain what happened next.

Other serious human rights abuses including unlawful killings, rape, torture, arbitrary arrest and illegal detention were committed by both the Chadian security forces and armed opposition groups during this period.

“It is important that the Chadian authorities conclude investigations into the case of Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh, prosecute and sanction perpetrators and provide reparation to the victims. The authorities should seek the assistance of the international community if they don’t have capacity to handle this particular case,” said Mukosa.

Impunity for enforced disappearance is still common in Chad. The whereabouts of people who disappeared including army officers and civilians in April 2006 in N’Djamena and in November 2007 in the Dar Tama region (North-eastern Chad) after their arrest by security forces remain unknown despite repeated requests from their family members and human rights organizations.

Enforced disappearance is a crime under international law and is prohibited by a range of treaties including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which Chad ratified on 1 November 2006, and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, signed by Chad on 6 February 2007.

Amnesty International calls on the International Organization of the Francophonie and the European Union whose experts have participated to the 2008 inquiry, to put more pressure on the Chadian authorities to ensure that investigations are concluded in this case as soon as possible.