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## **Equatorial Guinea: Surge in arbitrary arrests ahead of AU summit**

The authorities in Equatorial Guinea must immediately end a draconian clampdown on freedom of expression taking place ahead of an African Union summit in the capital Malabo on 23 June, Amnesty International said today.

Political opponents as well as some 100 students have been arbitrarily arrested and detained in recent months, apparently as a pre-emptive measure to prevent any demonstrations during the summit. Many of them were reportedly ill-treated.

"The authorities in Equatorial Guinea must end this deeply alarming wave of arrests, torture and ill-treatment of people merely exercising their right to freedom of expression," said Tawanda Hondora, Amnesty International's Deputy Director

"President Obiang's government is already among the worst human rights abusers in Africa and the continuing persecution of political opponents is deplorable."

All demonstrations in Equatorial Guinea have been banned following the mass uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa.

Police raids on neighbourhoods inhabited by foreigners in the port city of Bata reportedly intensified on the weekend of 11-12 June.

A number of undocumented foreign nationals, along with some foreigners legally residing in the country, were arrested and ill-treated in the crackdown.

"These indiscriminate raids on migrant communities must be brought to a halt. All undocumented migrants must be treated humanely and in accordance with the law. The authorities need to investigate these allegations," Tawanda Hondora said.

In late May, over 100 students were reportedly arrested and briefly detained in the port city of Bata. No reason for their arrest was given. Seven people believed to be members of opposition political parties were arrested and briefly detained in April.

Among them were Iris Loeto Sepa and Anselmo Ichaikotó, who were arrested in Malabo on 9 April on suspicion of being members of the Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island (MAIB). They do not belong to this organization and were released without charge on 23 April.

Prior to the arrests, the government ordered a news blackout in February on events on North Africa, the Middle East and in Ivory Coast. Access to the internet in Equatorial Guinea has reportedly become increasingly difficult.

In March, a radio journalist working for the state French language broadcaster was suspended for mentioning the situation in Libya in his radio programme. Juan Pedro Mendene was ordered by the Secretary of State for Information to leave the radio station. As he was leaving, he was attacked and beaten by the Secretary of State's bodyguard.

A week later, the director of the state radio station announced that broadcasts were temporarily suspended on the orders of higher authority. No other explanation for the suspension was given.

Amnesty International has also received reports of road blocks and arbitrary stop and search operations by the security forces, who harass, intimidate and demand bribes from both Equatorial Guinea nationals and foreigners.