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Togo: The authorities have a duty to respond to victims' need for justice

For the first time in Togo, more than a hundred victims of human rights abuses met at a collective of anti-impunity associations to file a complaint with the prosecuting authorities and obtain redress. Amnesty International is today calling on the authorities to respond to this need for justice in order to prevent further human rights abuses.

"The determination and courage of these victims and their families lead us to hope that, after decades of impunity, justice and the rule of law can finally reign in Togo", said Amnesty International in a report published today.

The document contains the testimony of some of the victims of the violence perpetrated during the transition period following the death, in February 2005, of President Gnassingbé Eyadema. These victims, whom Amnesty International met during a research mission in July 2006, are of different political backgrounds, some with links to the opposition parties, others members of the party in power, and many others simply civilians.

This document was to have been made public at a press conference in Lomé on 26 November 2006. Three days before its publication, the Togolese government asked Amnesty International for *"an appropriate period of time in which to comment"*. Wishing to maintain a constructive dialogue with the Togolese authorities, Amnesty International agreed to postpone the publication of its document. Several weeks later, the Togolese authorities forwarded their reaction – which is reported in the document published today.

"While taking note of the comments made by the Togolese authorities, we are disappointed that they have made no firm commitment to bringing the suspected perpetrators of the violence in 2005 to justice", Amnesty International said today.

There is, however, an urgent need for the complaints already filed, as well as those about to be filed, to be investigated independently and impartially by the judicial authorities in line with Togo's obligations under international law.

In this regard, *"it is essential that the victims, their families, witnesses and human rights defenders are afforded special protection so that they can give evidence to the court without fearing for their safety",* said Amnesty International today.

The extreme violence that followed the death of President Eyadema resulted in hundreds of dead and injured and forced into exile tens of thousands of people, who took refuge in neighbouring Benin and Ghana. The violence occurred in particular during the presidential election of April 2005, which was officially won by Faure Gnassingbé, the dead president's son, elected following a ballot marred by irregularities.

As Togo prepares for a new election planned for June 2007, the authorities also have a duty to implement important reforms to ensure that there is no repetition of the violence. These major reforms must focus, in

particular, on ensuring effective control of the armed forces and the security forces by civilian authorities and on strengthening the independence of the judiciary.

"We believe this is a historic opportunity for the authorities to show that they can match the courage of the victims of the violence perpetrated in 2005 by meeting their expectations of truth, justice and reparation", Amnesty International said today.

See the full Amnesty International report: *Togo: "I want to know why my son was killed"*, AI Index: AFR 57/001/2007. <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/fracfr570012007>