

PUBLIC

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20 February 2001

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC Abdoulaye Aboukary Tembeley, journalist

Journalist Abdoulaye Aboukary Tembeley was arrested on 14 February, after publishing an article entitled "Should [President] Patassé resign now?". He was reportedly severely beaten after his arrest. Furthermore he needs constant medication for a heart condition, which appears to have been aggravated by his ill-treatment. He is being treated at his own expense at a clinic in the capital, Bangui. He is due to go on trial on 21 February, when he could be remanded to prison. If so, Amnesty International is concerned that he may again be denied the medical treatment he needs. His health has already seriously deteriorated since his arrest.

After his arrest in Bangui, Abdoulaye Aboukary Tembeley was taken to the *Gendarmerie nationale*, National Gendarmerie Headquarters, where he was at first denied appropriate medication. He was reportedly severely beaten during interrogation, after which he appeared to be lapsing into a coma, and he was moved to a medical clinic on the orders of a court. He was then taken into police custody.

Abdoulaye Aboukary Tembeley appeared in court on 19 February, when he was charged by the Public Prosecutor with "inciting hatred and violence against a democratically elected institution" ("*incitation à la haine et à la révolte contre une institution démocratiquement élu*"). In court, the Public Prosecutor reportedly said that the state could not afford to provide him with medical care and ordered him to be returned to police custody. Following an intervention by his lawyers, Aboukary Tembeley was moved to a clinic where he is now receiving medical care at his own expense.

Abdoulaye Aboukary Tembeley is president of the *Mouvement de Défense des Droits de l'Homme* (MDDH), Human Rights Defence Movement. The article in question was published by the MDDH's *Journal des Droits de l'Homme*, Human Rights Journal. According to an opinion poll conducted by the magazine, of 200 people interviewed, 173 had called for the president of the Central African Republic (CAR), Ange-Félix Patassé, to resign.

His trial is scheduled to begin on 21 February 2001. According to *Reporters sans frontières*, Reporters without Borders, which campaigns worldwide for freedom of expression, Aboukary Tembeley's detention contravenes Article 15 of the CAR's Law No. 98.006 on freedom of communication. Article 15 stipulates that "journalists have the right to freely investigate all facts which are in the public interest, to bring forward for discussion all actions and declarations of all public and private institutions."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

President Ange-Félix Patassé has been facing increasing opposition. Many state employees have not been paid for over a year and the country is facing a severe economic crisis. From November 2000, trade unions and opposition political parties have called a series of general strikes expressing their frustration with the government. On 19 December, 73 people, including four members of parliament, were arrested after an illegal demonstration in the capital which called for President Patassé to resign. Journalist Raphaël Kopessou, who covered their trial for the weekly newspaper *Vouma la mouche*, was detained for 20 days but released without charge.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Aboukary Tembeley appears to have been arrested solely for his non-violent criticism of the President, and calling for him to be released immediately and unconditionally;
- expressing concern that health his health has deteriorated in custody, and at reports that he was ill-treated and denied medical care following his arrest on 14 February;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that, if he is to remain in custody, he is given all the medical care he needs for his cardiac condition, as well as treatment for any injuries he sustained during interrogation;
- calling for the allegations of ill-treatment to be investigated, and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO: (please note that fax numbers in Burundi can be difficult to reach)

Minister of National Defence

Jean Jacques DEMAFOUTH

Ministre de la Défense nationale et des Anciens combattants et de la restructuration de l'Armée

Ministère de la Défense

BANGUI

Central African Republic

Telegrams:Ministre Défense, Bangui, République centrafricaine

Salutation:Monsieur le Ministre

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Antoine GOTHE

Ministre de la Justice,

Réforme du droit et Garde des Sceaux

Ministère de la Justice

BANGUI

Central African Republic

Faxes: + 236 61 15 79 / 61 31 98

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Bangui, République centrafricaine

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

Minister of Territorial Administration and Public Security

Monsieur Théodore BIKOO

Ministre de l'Administration du territoire et de la Sécurité Publique

Ministère de l'Intérieur

BANGUI

Central African Republic

Faxes: + 236 61 70 54

Telegrams: Ministre Sécurité Publique, Bangui, République centrafricaine

Salutation:Monsieur le Ministre

Minister of Communication, Posts and Telecommunications

Monsieur Albert Francis WAKANGA

Ministre des Communications des Postes et des télécommunications

Ministère de la Communication

BP 1290

BANGUI

Central African Republic

Telegrams: Ministre Communication, Bangui, République centrafricaine

Salutation:Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign and Francophone Affairs

Monsieur Marcel METEFARA

Ministre des Affaires étrangères et de la Francophonie

Ministère des Affaires étrangères

BP 936

BANGUI

Central African Republic

and to diplomatic representatives of the Central African Republic accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 April 2001.