

0001 hrs gmt Wednesday 21 April 1993

CHAD: @HUNDREDS OF DEATHS UNDERLINE BROKEN PROMISES OF REFORM

The government that came to power in Chad promising an end to human rights violations has traded the promises in for power - and the cost has been the lives of hundreds of civilians.

The government of President Idriss Déby took over in December 1990 after years of bloodshed, with a slogan of "Never again" - yet within a year the political imprisonment and killings that had plagued Chad for years had resumed, as the government used its security forces to cling on to power at the cost of human rights. Two years on, its record is bloody:

- over 500 people have been extrajudicially executed by the security forces - more than 100 unarmed civilians in one incident alone
- dozens of people have "disappeared"
- torture is routine and has led to the death of detainees
- over 1,000 people have been detained for short periods - yet no political prisoner has ever been brought to trial
- no-one implicated in torturing or killing prisoners - under the present or former governments - has ever been brought to trial.

"Any challenge to the government - real or imagined - has been crushed," said Amnesty International, in a report released today. "And the result has been the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians.

"Opposition to the government means death or imprisonment, because armed force is now entrenched as the usual way of resolving political disputes. The security forces act as judge, jury and executioner: basic rights are not respected, they feel no need to obey laws or respect the rule of law, they interfere with the judiciary and act with complete impunity. Small wonder so many people have paid with their lives."

In one incident last August, over 100 civilians were slaughtered when armed forces went on the rampage after an attack by an armed opposition group on their garrison in Doba. The soldiers opened fire on citizens in the street, shot into homes and at innocent civilians in the fields and looted and robbed. The killings lasted more than a day.

Eventually, the dead included six children and dozens more were wounded. There has been no inquiry into the massacre, no-one has been brought to justice and the commander of the garrison - who had reportedly been involved in repression in the 1980s - is still in his post.

"Tragically, this is typical of the problem," said Amnesty International. "The government quite simply refuses to accept that human rights violations are going on at all - despite the evidence of hundreds of corpses.

"Until the government takes responsibility and starts sending a clear signal to its security forces that this won't be tolerated, the impunity will continue - and so will the killings."

The killings of innocent civilians have carried on this year, despite the opening of a National Conference in January, which has brought supporters and opponents of the government together to debate political reforms. Appeals by its Chairperson for an independent inquiry into recent killings by troops have been spurned by the government.

Amnesty International has made a series of recommendations to the government, including simple steps such as keeping records of those detained and ensuring that detainees are charged or released within 24 hours. It urged the National Conference to enact these into a new Constitution.

Said the organization: "At the moment, the security forces ride roughshod over the rule of law. It is time for the government to bring them to heel."

Amnesty International is also calling on foreign governments which assist Chad's security forces to press for an end to the killing and for public accountability. In particular, the organization notes in its report that France and the United States of America have long provided funds and equipment to Chad's security forces - even though those same forces continue to carry out serious human rights violations.

Before December 1990 these and other foreign governments remained virtually silent in the face of thousands of killings or prisoners. "Foreign governments backed Chad's rulers in the 1980s with a cynical disregard for human rights," said Amnesty International.

"What is needed now is a drastic change of attitude. Foreign governments must take note of the murderous repression of the past two years and insist on an immediate end to it."

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