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CHAD: BLATANT ARBITRARY ACTIONS COMBINED WITH TOTAL IMPUNITY

The terror that marked Chad under President Hisssein Habré continues to characterize the exercise of power under his successor, General Idriss Déby, according to Amnesty International.

An Amnesty International delegation visited Chad in April 1996 and held talks with Chadian officials on the gravity of the human rights situation. In the field, especially in the south of the country, they also noted the persistence of practices such as extrajudicial execution, torture, ill-treatment in detention frequently leading to death, and imprisonment of prisoners of conscience.

Amnesty International pointed out that the Chadian authorities were failing to conduct thorough and impartial investigations into most of the reported instances of violations. No perpetrator of these violations has been brought to justice, contrary to the promises made by General Déby when he came to power in 1990.

The silence or complicity of certain other countries merely encourages the Chadian rulers in their repressive policies. In April, the Chadian Government, with the help of several countries including France and Gabon, succeeded in preventing public consideration by the Human Rights Commission in Geneva of any resolution criticizing its human rights record.

On the sole grounds of suspected membership of the "codos", a nickname for the armed opposition in the southern provinces, hundreds of Chadians have been held incommunicado for months or even years without charge or trial. Prisoners are often chained together in groups of six, manacled, and fettered with heavy chains. Several people accused of "having dealings with the enemy" were arrested between July and October 1995 and imprisoned in appalling conditions. Despite promises given by the Minister of Justice to the Amnesty International delegation that an investigation would be opened into the circumstances of their arrest and that they would be freed if no charges were to be brought against them, these people are still being held at Faya Largeau without charge or trial.

"Use of torture seems to be increasingly common in Chad and ill-treatment to be widespread throughout the country", said Amnesty International.

Use of the *arbatachar*, a method by which the victim's arms and legs are tied behind his back, causing extreme pain, open wounds and sometimes gangrene, has become commonplace. Several testimonies recorded by Amnesty International refer to prisoners being placed in sacks and submerged in the River Logone.

Ill-treatment at the time of arrest is not confined to political opponents or members of armed groups. Women and children have been subjected to numerous violations committed with impunity by the security forces. Rape has become one of the most vicious instruments of repression

against women. The victims' age is no impediment to the troops' brutality – girls of 12 have been raped. In some cases, when the security forces have committed a rape, they even force their victims' husbands to follow suit in public.

In March 1996, supposedly in order to drive away the "codos", the security forces opened fire on civilians in Goré market in Logone Occidental. At least 11 people, including children, were seriously injured. Thirteen-year-old Rimoumbubue Diallo had to have an arm and a leg amputated.

Torture and ill-treatment in detention centres have led to the deaths of several prisoners. They are often taken from their cells by the Gendarmerie commandant for interrogation without the authority of the public prosecutor. In August 1995, Mbaïtare Nasson, a "codo", was taken from his cell by gendarmes. He was reportedly tied to a tree and had nails hammered into his head. He was found dead. Following these "interrogations", several detainees have died in similar circumstances.

Violations committed by the security forces are not confined to detention centres. Military operations with the declared aim of capturing members of armed groups regularly result in the killing of civilians. On 16 August, Bichara Digui, a member of the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP, *Rassemblement pour la démocratie et le progrès*), an opposition party, was shot dead in N'Djaména by people who may have belonged to the security forces. No investigation appears to have been opened into the circumstances of his death.

Amnesty International strongly condemns abuses committed by armed opposition groups, such as deliberate and arbitrary killings, hostage-taking and violence against women.

Amnesty International is appealing to all governments to ensure that the military aid and technical assistance supplied by them to the Chadian government are not used to facilitate or cloak human rights violations.

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For further information, please contact;

Gaetan Mootoo, Amnesty International, Paris Section
tel; + 33 1 43 38 14 54 or + 33 1 49 23 11 51