

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 26/02/97

11 August 1997

Further information on UA 248/97 (AFR 26/01/97, 31 July 1997) - Fear of refoulement and new concern: Ill-treatment

GABON / RWANDA At least 123 Rwandese asylum-seekers in Gabon

On 9 August 1997, the Gabonese authorities reportedly forced 115 Rwandese asylum-seekers to board an aeroplane destined for Kigali, the capital of Rwanda.

The 115 - consisting of members of the *Forces armées rwandaises* (FAR), the former Rwandese armed forces, and their families - were among the group of 123 who had stated earlier that they did not want to return to Rwanda. They include one major, two lieutenants, four second-lieutenants, two warrant officers, 16 sergeants, 31 corporals and 41 soldiers.

About 20 minutes after the aeroplane took off, the asylum-seekers reportedly threatened and assaulted the pilot and demanded that he fly them to another destination. The aeroplane eventually returned to Franceville in Gabon. On arrival, the asylum-seekers were reportedly beaten by members of the Gabonese security forces and led away to an unknown destination. Their current whereabouts are not known.

There are fears that the Gabonese authorities may try to send them back to Kigali once again. The President of Gabon has stated that it might be difficult for Gabon to guarantee their security. The decision to put the asylum-seekers on board an aeroplane bound for Kigali was reportedly taken by the President.

Before the group of 115 boarded the aeroplane, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had begun a screening process to determine the status of the Rwandese asylum-seekers in Gabon. The claims of around 40 of them had begun to be processed, at least eight of whom reportedly qualified for UNHCR protection. The screening process had not yet been completed when the Gabonese authorities decided to forcibly repatriate the 115 Rwandese. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) has also sent representatives to Gabon to investigate the cases of some of these asylum-seekers in relation to the role they may have played in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

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

- expressing concern at reports that 115 Rwandese asylum-seekers were made to board an aeroplane destined for Kigali on 9 August and that they were beaten by members of the Gabonese security forces when the aeroplane returned to Gabon;
- stressing that this group includes not only former soldiers but also members of their families;
- asking for information on the current whereabouts of this group of 115, as well as of the other civilian Rwandese asylum-seekers, and for guarantees of their safety while in Gabon;
- reiterating your concerns about the risk of human rights violations they would face in Rwanda;
- reiterating that if this group includes individuals suspected of having participated in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, these accusations should be investigated and, if appropriate, the individuals brought to justice according to international standards, by a jurisdiction which will not sentence to death those found guilty.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence
Monsieur El-Hadj Omar BONGO
Président de la République
Présidence de la République
BP 546, Libreville, Gabon
Telegrams: Président El-Hadji Omar Bongo
Libreville, Gabon
Salutation: Monsieur le Président/Dear President

Dr Paulin OBAME NGUEMA
Premier Ministre
Bureau du Premier Ministre, Libreville, Gabon
Telegrams: Premier Ministre, Libreville, Gabon
Fax: +241 77 20 04
Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre/Dear Prime Minister

Monsieur le Général Idriss NGARI
Ministre de la Défense nationale, de la sécurité et de l'immigration
Ministère de la Défense nationale, de la sécurité et de l'immigration
BP 13493, Libreville, Gabon
Telegrams: Ministre de la Défense, Libreville, Gabon
Fax: +241 74 60 47 / +241 77 86 96
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

Monsieur Casimir OYE MBA
Ministre des affaires étrangères et de la coopération
Ministère des affaires étrangères
BP 2245, Libreville, Gabon
Telegrams: Ministre des affaires étrangères, Libreville, Gabon
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Gabon accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 27 September 1997.