

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Legal concern

19 February 1992

Côte d'Ivoire: Martial AHIPEAUD, President of Fédération estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI), Ivorian Federation of Students and School Pupils
Laurent AKOUN, former President of the Syndicat national des Enseignants du Secondaire de Côte d'Ivoire (SYNESCI), National Union of Secondary School Teachers
Laurent GBAGBO, leader of the opposition Front populaire ivoirien (FPI), Ivorian Popular Front
Simone GBAGBO (female), wife of Laurent Gbagbo
René Dégny SÉGUI, President of the Ligue ivoirienne des Droits de l'Homme (LIDHO), Ivorian League of Human Rights

Francis WODIÉ, President of the opposition Parti Ivoirien des Travailleurs (PIT), Ivorian Workers' Party, and former head of Amnesty International's Ivorian Section

and at least 250 others

The six people named above are among at least 250 people arrested on 13 and 16 February 1992 in the capital, Abidjan, in connection with demonstrations against the government. The demonstrations criticised the government's refusal to act on the findings of a Commission of Inquiry into an apparently punitive raid launched by the military on Abidjan University's Yopougon student residence on 17 May 1991, which followed confrontation between students and the security forces.

The first demonstration took place on 13 February when the security forces used tear gas to break up gatherings of students and school pupils, some of whom then retaliated by throwing stones. During that day, according to government sources, 143 people were arrested, including Martial Ahipeaud, leader of FESCI.

At the second and much larger demonstration on 16 February, opposition parties, trade unions and the Ivorian Human Rights League demanded the release of Martial Ahipeaud and others who had been arrested and criticised the use of force by the security authorities. The march started peacefully but later on there were violent attacks by some marchers on cars and other property. The government has stated that a further 103 people were then arrested. It has been reliably reported that demonstrators were teargassed and beaten and that the security forces publicly beat some detainees on the soles of the feet before taking them away. Those arrested included the head of the Ivorian League of Human Rights, and political and trade union leaders. Some detainees are believed not to have participated in the demonstrations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The findings of the Commission of Inquiry into the incident at the university in May 1991 were presented on 29 January 1992. The Commission concluded that soldiers were guilty of raping and beating students during the raid and identified the army Chief of Staff, General Robert Guei, as solely responsible for the decision to send troops onto the university campus. It recommended that he should be punished. However, President Houphouët Boigny criticised the Commission's findings and refused to take any action against General Guei.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/airmail letters:

- inquiring about the legal basis for detention and any charges being proffered against the six people named above and the other 250 people arrested;
- requesting an assurance that they are not being subjected to ill-treatment in custody;
- urging the authorities to allow them immediate access to legal counsel, to relatives and medical facilities;
- expressing concern that many detainees could be prisoners of conscience and urging the authorities that any people held purely on account of their non-violent political activities should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- urging the government that where there is evidence that recognizable criminal charges could be brought the person should be given a prompt and fair trial.

APPEALS TO

1) President:

Son Excellence

Monsieur le Président / Dear President

Felix Houphouët-Boigny

Président de la République

La Présidence

Boulevard Clozel, Abidjan

République de Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: President Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan

Cote d'Ivoire

Telexes: 23754 PRESID CI or 23169 PRELIT CI

2) Prime Minister:

M. Alassane Ouattara

Monsieur le Premier Ministre /

Premier Ministre

Dear Prime Minister

Le Primature

Abidjan

République de Côte D'Ivoire

Telegrams: Premier Ministre, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

3) Minister of Justice:

Mme Jacqueline Lohoues-Oble

Madame le Ministre /

Ministre de la Justice

Dear Minister

Ministère de la Justice

Boulevard Angoulvant

BP V107, Abidjan

République de Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire

Telexes: 23752 MINAFET CI (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

4) Minister of Interieur:

M. Emile-Constant Bombet

Monsieur le Ministre /

Ministre de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité

Dear Minister

Ministère de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité

Boulevard Angoulvant

Abidjan

République de Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: Ministre Interieur, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: diplomatic representatives of Côte d'Ivoire in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 April 1992.