

25 April 2001

AI Index AFR 39/001/2001 - News Service Nr. 74

Mauritius: Amnesty International calls for independent investigation of torture complaints

Amnesty International today expressed concern over the continuing failure of the Mauritian government to investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment during criminal investigation procedures.

"The repeated accusations brought against the Mauritian authorities by individuals who claim that their right to be free from torture and ill-treatment and their right to be given a fair trial have been violated put a question mark behind the government's commitment to the protection of human rights."

On 23 April 2001, members of the Curepipe Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Mauritius arrested Bernard Maigrot on suspicion of killing 32-year old Vanessa Lagesse on the night of 9 to 10 March this year. He was held incommunicado for several hours after his arrest, without access to any legal assistance or his family. According to police sources, Bernard Maigrot confessed to the murder during interrogation. In a court hearing on 24 April, Bernard Maigrot withdrew the confession, claiming it had been obtained under torture and before he was able to have any contact with his lawyers. A previous suspect in the case, who was released from police detention on 13 April, has also accused the CID of ill-treatment.

Ill-treatment of criminal suspects during interrogation has been reported in a number of cases in Mauritius in recent months, and has for many years been of concern to local and international human rights monitors. Although the police or courts have in the past ordered inquiries into such allegations, these have either been inconclusive or their results have not been made public.

Mauritius has for many years been a party to the United Nations Convention against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its first Optional Protocol, as well as a number of other international human rights instruments.

"Whether all the accusations made in recent months can be ultimately substantiated or not, there is an urgent need for a firm commitment from the authorities to independently and impartially investigate all accusations of torture or ill-treatment," the organization said. "The results of these investigations should be made public, and anybody found responsible be brought to justice."

Background

*In a letter to the government of Mauritius in December 2000, Amnesty International raised concerns about the alleged ill-treatment of Cehl Meeah, leader of the opposition *Party of God* (Hizbullah), as well as about the fact that he was initially held incommunicado and not given immediate access to legal assistance after his arrest. The organization has not yet received any response to its letter from the authorities.*

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>