

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 57/006/2003

UA 179/03

Fear of torture/Prisoners of Conscience (POCs)

20 June 2003

TOGO

**Dimas Dzikodo (m), Chief Editor of l'*Événement*,
Philippe Evegno (m), Publishing Director of l'*Événement*
Colombo Kpakpabia (m), journalist at *Nouvel Echo***

The three journalists named above were arrested in the capital Lomé, by the security forces between 14 and 15 June. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience who have been arrested solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Dimas Dzikodo, editor in Chief of the private weekly newspaper l'*Événement* was arrested on 14 June at a cyber café in Lomé. He had been scanning pictures of people who were allegedly injured by the security forces during the Presidential elections on 1 June. Philippe Evegno, his director of publications was arrested on the morning of 15 June. They are being held at Lomé Civil Prison and have been charged with "spreading of false information and public disorder".

On 19 June, the two journalists were presented to a press conference organised by the Togolese authorities who accused them of wanting to send the pictures abroad in order to tarnish the image of the country. The *Commissaire* (police superintendent) reportedly claimed that the said pictures were of people injured during car accidents and not of victims of security force repression. According to eye witnesses, Dimas Dzikodo seemed weak and complained of ill-treatment during the four days the men were allegedly held in incommunicado detention.

Colombo Kpakpabia, a journalist for the weekly newspaper *Nouvel Echo*, was arrested on 14 or 15 June. He has been held at the Direction Générale de la Police in Lomé since 15 June 2003. He was not present at the press conference and the authorities did not acknowledge nor deny that he was in their custody. It is not known exactly why Colombo Kpakpabia was arrested and Amnesty International fears he may also have been tortured.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The presidential election that took place in Togo on 1 June 2003 resulted in clashes between opposition supporters and the security forces, who made arrests and used force to suppress demonstrations and discontent in several parts of the country. In May 2003, the security forces arrested about forty people whom the military suspect of voting for opposition candidates or inciting other people to do so. One person was shot dead in the back in an extrajudicial killing by a member of the security forces. Another was seriously wounded in this incident.

Independent Togolese journalists and media are regularly intimidated and arrested. In the pre and post-electoral period, the Togolese authorities have seemed particularly concerned to control all information that could harm their image. The authorities have put pressure on the press not to publish information which is hostile to the government. In the days that preceded the election, several media figures were told to publish only the official election results and to avoid commenting on the elections themselves. Since September 2002, several Internet websites such as *letogolais.com* and the website of the main opposition party *Union des forces de changement* (UFC), Union of Forces for Change, have been censored by the authorities.

Amnesty International has repeatedly raised its concerns with the Togolese authorities about the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment, and about the lack of safeguards provided to people held in detention. Police are allowed by law to detain people in custody for up to 48 hours, before bringing them before a judge. The period of detention is renewable once, with the authorization of the Public Prosecutor. In its concluding observations on Togo in October 2002, the United Nations Human Rights Committee, considering its periodic report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), noted "with concern the many allegations that torture is common practice in Togo, particularly on arrest, during police custody

and in places of detention.....” Amnesty International believes that the principal reason for the persistence of torture in Togo is the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French or your own language:

- stating that Amnesty International considers Dimas Dzikodo, Philippe Evegno and Colombo Kpakpabia to be prisoners of conscience and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release;
- urging the Togolese authorities to take immediate measures to prevent Colombo Kpakpabia being tortured or ill-treated and to guarantee his safety;
- requesting that a thorough investigation be conducted into the possible beating of Dimas Dzikodo and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to end arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and ill-treatment of anyone critic of the government in Togo.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Togo

His Excellency /Son Excellence
Monsieur le Général Gnassingbé Eyadéma
Président de la République
Palais présidentiel, Avenue de la Marina
Lomé, Togo

Telegrams: President de la Republique, Lome, Togo
Fax: +228 221 32 04 (Please specify : « À l'attention du Président de la République »)
Email: presidence@republicoftogo.com
Salutation: Dear President/Monsieur le Président

Minister of Interior

Monsieur Akila Ezzo Boko
Ministre de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité
Ministère de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité
Rue Albert Sarraut
Lomé, Togo

Telegram: Ministre de l'Interieur, Lomé, Togo
Email: info@republicoftogo.com (This address is used by all ministeries, so please specify : « À l'attention du ministre de l'Intérieur »)
Salutation: Dear Minister / Monsieur le Ministre

Minister of Justice

Katari Foly-Bazi
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice, Avenue de la Marina
Rue Colonel le Roux
Lomé, Togo

Telegram: Ministre de la Justice, Lome, Togo
Fax: +228 221 22 06
Salutation: Dear Minister/ Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES TO:

Minister of Communication and Civic Education

Ministère de la Communication et de la Formation Civique
BP 40
Lomé, Togo

Telegram: Ministre de la Communication, Lome, Togo

Fax: +228 221 43 80
Salutation: Dear Minister/ Monsieur le Ministre
Email: minfocabtg@yahoo.fr

and diplomatic representatives of Togo accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 August 2003.