

UA 86/00

Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment/Prisoners
of conscience

14 April 2000

BURKINA FASO

Halidou Ouédraogo, President, Mouvement burkinabè des
droits de l'homme et des peuples
Tolé Sagnon, trade unionist,
Norbert Tiendrébéogo, leader of opposition political party
Me Bénéwendé Sankara, lawyer
Dr Pierre Bidima
Etienne Traoré, university teacher

In a continuing pattern of harassment and intimidation, six members of a coalition of political parties, human rights organizations, trade unions, journalists' and students' organizations - campaigning to end impunity for human rights violations in Burkina Faso - have been arrested since 10 April 2000.

All have been subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment by having their heads shaved in police detention. They are held by the *Direction de la compagnie d'intervention rapide* (DCIR), the police rapid deployment force and have been denied visits.

They appear to have been detained solely because of their legitimate activities to end impunity for human rights violations.

All are prominent members of the *Collectif d'organisations démocratiques de masse et de partis politiques*, formed to call for those responsible for the murder of prominent journalist Norbert Zongo and three others in December 1998 to be brought to justice.

Halidou Ouédraogo, Tolé Sagnon and Norbert Tiendrébéogo were arrested at their homes in the early hours of 13 April. Halidou Ouédraogo is the president of the *Collectif* as well as a non-governmental human rights organization, *Mouvement burkinabè des droits de l'homme et des peuples* (MBDHP), the Burkinabè Movement for Human and Peoples' Rights. Tolé Sagnon, vice-president of the *Collectif*, is Secretary General of the *Confédération générale des travailleurs du Burkina* (CGT-B), General Confederation of Burkinabè Workers. Norbert Tiendrébéogo is president of an opposition political party, the *Front des forces sociales* (FFS), Social Forces Front.

Bénéwendé Sankara, a lawyer who heads the *Union des jeunes avocats du Burkina* (UJAB), Union of Young Burkinabè lawyers, was arrested on the afternoon of 13 April.

Dr Pierre Bidima and Etienne Traoré were among 33 people arrested on 10 April during a meeting at the MBDHP offices. All were released except for Dr Pierre Bidima. Etienne Traoré was re-arrested on 14 April. Police reportedly said that "molotov cocktails" explosives were found in Dr Bidima's car.

These arrests followed a call by the *Collectif* for a three-day general strike after police used force to break up a demonstration on 8 April in the capital, Ouagadougou, in protest at delays in bringing those responsible for the death of Norbert Zongo and his companions to justice. Thirty demonstrators were wounded by the security forces, seven seriously. On 10 April, the first day of the strike, there were further violent confrontations between students and school pupils and the security forces. Universities and schools have since been closed by the authorities.

On 13 April the government denounced the *Collectif* for persistently violating the law and endangering public order. No charges have, however, yet been brought against any of those detained. Under Burkinabè law, anyone arrested should be brought before a judicial authority within 72 hours to be either charged or released.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Public outrage generated by the death of Norbert Zongo and three others in December 1998 has resulted in widespread social unrest and calls for an end to impunity for human rights violations. Demonstrations have led to arrests and ill-treatment by the security forces.

At the time of his death, Norbert Zongo had been investigating the death of David Ouédraogo, chauffeur of François Compaoré, President Blaise Compaoré's brother. David Ouédraogo had been arrested in December 1997 and died the following month after being tortured by the presidential security force (*Régiment de la sécurité présidentielle*). Although an Independent Commission of Inquiry in May 1999 named six members of the presidential security force as serious suspects in the murder of Norbert Zongo, no one has been prosecuted.

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

- expressing concern about the arrest and detention of Halidou Ouédraogo, Tolé Sagnon, Norbert Tiendrébéogo, Bénéwendé Sankara, Dr Pierre Bidima and Etienne Traoré and requesting clarification of the reasons and legal basis for their arrest;
- urging that they be immediately and unconditionally released, if, as it appears, they have been arrested solely because of their legitimate activities in calling for an end to impunity for human rights violations;
- expressing serious concern that all six men have been subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment by having their heads shaved in police detention, and urging that Burkina Faso comply with its obligations under the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment which it ratified in January 1999;
- urging that those detained be immediately allowed visits from lawyers, doctors and their families.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence
Monsieur Blaise Compaoré
Président, La Présidence
01 BP 24, Ouagadougou 01
Burkina Faso

Telegrams: President Blaise Compaoré, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Faxes: + 226 31 49 26

Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear President Compaoré

Son Excellence
Monsieur Paul Tiemdé
Ministre de Justice et Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice, 01 BP 526
Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Faxes: + 226 31 71 37

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Mr Tiemdé

COPIES TO:

L'Observateur Paalga: 01 BP 584, Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso. Faxes: + 226 31 45 79

L'Indépendant: 01 BP 4829, Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso

Le Pays: 01 BP 4577, Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso. Faxes: + 226 31 45 50

Le Journal du Jeudi: 01 BP 3654, Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso. Faxes: + 226 31 17 12

Centre national de presse Norbert Zongo, 04 BP 8524, Ouagadougou 04, Burkina Faso. Faxes: + 226 34 37 45

and to diplomatic representatives of Burkina Faso accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 May 2000.