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TOGO: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLING ON GOVERNMENT TO HONOUR ITS DECLARATIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Amnesty International is calling on the government in Togo to turn its declarations on human rights into concrete actions and to carry out its promise to bring to justice those responsible for the latest extrajudicial executions by the army. The organization urges President Gnassingbé Eyadéma to break with the past, to curb the powers of the army and to encourage respect for human rights. This would be an important first step to break the cycle of violence and impunity which has protected the security forces and resulted in the dramatic increase in human rights violations seen in Togo since 1990.

On 14 February 1994 the burned bodies of three members of an opposition party - the Comité d'Action pour le Renouveau (CAR), Action Committee for Renewal - were discovered. They included M. Gaston Aziadovo Edeh, who, only one week previously, had been elected to parliament in Togo's first ever multi-party elections. Two days previously, the three victims were seen being kidnapped, reportedly by military personnel, from their car.

President Eyadéma has condemned the killings and admitted that people in military uniform had seized the victims. He has ordered an inquiry into the killings, with a view to arresting those responsible and bringing them to justice. However, the Togolese Armed Forces have denied any responsibility for the killings.

While welcoming President Eyadéma's statement, Amnesty International fears that, as on many occasions in the past, the President's stated commitment to human rights will not be followed by any action to bring human rights violators to justice. Since the beginning of 1993, there have been repeated examples of human rights violations committed by members of the security forces which have gone unchecked:

- In January 1993 more than 19 people were killed by the Togolese Armed Forces during a peaceful demonstration in the capital, Lomé. Despite pressure from the French and German governments whose representatives were in Lomé at the time of the demonstration, there has been no investigation into these extrajudicial executions.
- In March 1993, at least 20 people, including both military and civilian personnel, were extrajudicially executed by the Togolese Armed Forces. This followed an attack on the main army barracks in Lomé but many of those killed appeared to have been targeted because of their ethnic origin or opposition to the government. No investigation was carried out.
- In August 1993, the day after the widely-criticised presidential elections which returned President Eyadéma to power, 40 people were arrested by a special security force assisted by members of the armed forces. Twenty-one of the prisoners died in custody within 24 hours, but there has been no investigation into the deaths.
- In January 1994, following another attack on the main army barracks in Lomé, at least 48 people were extrajudicially executed by the Togolese Armed Forces. Twelve of those killed had been held in military custody since March 1993. There has been no investigation into these killings.

The security forces have repeatedly committed human rights violations which, if not done on instruction, are at least perpetrated in the confidence that, they will not face prosecution. These feelings of impunity have been enforced by support for President Eyadéma's government from foreign governments, notably the authorities in France.

There are currently troops from France and Burkina Faso in Togo as there were at the time of the August 1993 presidential elections. Their role is to ensure that the Togolese Armed Forces remain in the barracks to allow the second round of parliamentary elections to go ahead without interference. However, as in August 1993, when 21 people were arrested by members of the armed forces and died shortly afterward in suspicious circumstances, they have fulfilled their role effectively.

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