

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: AFR 20/010/2008
18 December 2008

Chad: End impunity for human rights violations

Chadian authorities must account for human rights violations associated with the February 2008 attack on N'djamena

Amnesty international is concerned that more than 10 months after unlawful killings and other human rights abuses that occurred during and after the February 2008 attack on N'Djamena, the Chadian authorities have not brought those responsible to justice.

In a report released today, Amnesty International highlights serious human rights violations committed by the armed groups and Chadian government forces before, during and after the Ndjamenan attack. These human rights violations included unlawful killings and summary execution, enforced "disappearances", harassment of human rights defenders and journalists, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detentions, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, and forced evictions.

In violation of their obligations under international law, the armed opposition groups which attacked N'Djamena in February deliberately placed civilians at risk by launching their attacks from areas inhabited by civilians. Government forces were also responsible for apparently not taking sufficient measures to ensure that civilians were not caught in the cross-fire as they battled armed opposition groups.

Amnesty International calls on the government of Chad to initiate criminal proceedings against members of their security forces, and others, who committed human rights violations.

In addition, the government of Chad must implement in full the recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry, which it set up in April to investigate the events relating to the February attack on N'Djamena.

Since 2006, scores of people in Chad, arrested by the security forces, were the victims of enforced disappearance. On 3 February 2008, Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh, leader of a coalition of political opposition groups, was arrested at his home in N'Djamena by members of the Chadian security forces. He has not been seen since. In April 2006, after an assault by armed groups on N'Djamena, at least 13 high ranking army officers were arrested and they have not been heard from since. Three months earlier, on 30 November 2007, eight people were arrested in the eastern town of Gueréda and their whereabouts remain unknown.

Amnesty International deplores what appears to be Chadian security forces' policy of enforcedly disappearing suspected or real political opponents. This practice constitutes a violation of the victims' right to life and protection of the law, and also constitutes a violation of Chad's own obligations under international law.

The Chadian government must promptly disclose the whereabouts of these men. If they are still in custody, the authorities must allow the men to have access to their lawyers, medical doctors and relatives. In addition, unless the authorities charge the detained men with recognizable criminal offences, they must be immediately released.

Amnesty International also calls on the Chadian authorities to grant compensation to the tens of thousands of people who were forcibly evicted from areas in N'Djamena in the aftermath of the February attack. In addition, the government must put in place a law and a framework to prevent further forced evictions.

Human rights defenders were subjected to a campaign of attacks and harassment by government security agents, before and after the February attack on N'Djamena.

Amnesty International urges the Chadian government to publicly acknowledge the important work carried out by human rights defenders in Chad. In addition, they must put in place laws and practices to ensure that human rights defenders, including journalists are not subjected to harassment, threats, attacks, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detentions. The Chadian authorities should respect and guarantee human rights defenders' freedom of expression, association and their rights to peaceful assembly.

Amnesty International calls upon the Chadian government to repeal provisions of Ordinance Law number 05, which violate to freedom of expression, unduly restricting the ability of the print and electronic media to freely operate in Chad. Some of the provisions of Ordinance Law number 05 violate the Chadian Constitution, and international human rights treaties to which Chad is a party.

Amnesty International welcomes the December 2008 decision of the French judicial authorities to investigate allegations of illegal arms sales to Chad by a company based in France. However, the organization remains concerned that French military assistance and cooperation with the Chadian government may have contributed to human rights violations during the February 2008 fighting in N'Djamena. The organization calls on France to review its military assistance to Chad in order to establish appropriate measures to ensure that French military cooperation, including weapons, personnel and training are not used to commit human rights violations, but rather to prevent them. Amnesty International is also calling on other governments and businesses operating from their territories not to transfer arms or other military equipment or expertise likely to be used to violate human rights or international humanitarian law by the government or armed political groups in Chad.

Background

Intense fighting between the Chadian army and a coalition of three armed political groups raged in various parts of the Chadian capital, N'Djamena, on 2 and 3 February 2008. Serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law were committed during the fighting. Most of the violations were committed after 3 February when the government regained the control of the city. They comprised extrajudicial executions, enforced "disappearances", arbitrary arrests and unlawful detentions. A clampdown on human rights defenders and journalists perceived by the authorities as sympathetic to opposition groups was imposed. Tens of thousands were left homeless and jobless after the government started in March a campaign to demolish houses and small businesses in and around the city centre of N'Djamena. Children from the affected families stopped going to school.

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