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Chad: Amnesty International questions French claims as Sarkozy prepares to visit N'Djamena

Amnesty International has received evidence that the French government knew about the whereabouts of three detained senior Chadian opposition figures as early as 11 February, although they publicly denied having any such information.

The revelation comes as French President Nicolas Sarkozy prepares to visit Chadian President Idriss Deby in N'Djamena, the beleaguered capital of Chad still under a state of emergency following raging gun battles with armed opposition groups earlier this month.

The three prominent opposition figures -- Lol Mahamat Choua, Ngarlejy Yorongar, and Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh – “disappeared” on 3 February in N'Djamena, as armed opposition forces entered the capital. The French authorities claimed at the time that they had no information about their whereabouts.

However, private correspondence seen by Amnesty International today shows that the French knew at the time that the three men had been arrested by the Chadian security officers and were being held at the notorious intelligence headquarters in N'Djamena, the Direction des Renseignements Généraux.

Lol Mahamat Choua is now under house arrest, but the fate of Ngarlejy Yorongar and Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh still remains unclear.

“The French government must immediately disclose publicly all information they have about the fate of these two men,” said Tawanda Hondora, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Africa Programme.

“These men are at grave risk of being tortured. The French government should not cover up the excesses of the Chadian government – whatever bilateral agreements they may have.”

“When he meets with President Deby, President Sarkozy must demand in no uncertain terms that Chadian authorities reveal the whereabouts of these two men, and then either charge them or release them immediately.”

Amnesty International also called on the Chadian government to stop indiscriminately arresting actual or perceived supporters of opposition groups.