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CHAD: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR AN INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE MURDER OF BICHARA DIGUI

The Chadian Government should immediately set up an independent and impartial investigation into the assassination on 16 August of opposition politician Bichara Digui, Amnesty International said.

Bichara Digui was shot by two unidentified men, as he returned to his home in N'Djaména and many local sources have claimed he may have been killed by government agents. He is reported to have been threatened on a number of occasions, including receiving death threats, by members of the security forces since his release from detention in December 1994, apparently in an attempt to intimidate him from participating in any political opposition to the government.

Amnesty International fears he may have been targeted because of his past links with armed groups and his current peaceful political opposition. Bichara Digui was a member of the *Rassemblement pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (RDP), Rally for Democracy and Progress, an opposition political party led by Lol Mahamat Choua, a former president of Chad.

“Those responsible for this crime should be promptly identified and brought to justice in accordance with international standards of fairness and without recourse to the death penalty,” the human rights organization said.

## **BACKGROUND**

Bichara Digui had previously been a member of the executive committee of the *Comité national de redressement* (CNR), National Committee of Recovery. The CNR's leader, Abbass Koty Yachoub, was extrajudicially executed on 22 October 1993 in N'Djaména close to the house of Bichara Digui by members of the Chadian security forces. Abbass Koty Yachoub had recently returned from exile after signing a peace accord with the Chadian authorities under the terms of which the CNR was recognized as a political party. Bichara Digui and a number of other CNR supporters were arrested immediately after the extrajudicial execution of Abbass Koty Yachoub and held without charge or trial until December 1994 at the *Renseignements généraux*. Amnesty International believes that they may have been prisoners of conscience because there was no proof that the detainees had used or advocated violence.

Ten members of two Chadian armed groups, the CNR and the *Armée nationale tchadienne en dissidence* (ANT/D), Dissident National Chadian Army were arrested on 25 July 1996 in Sudan. Six were handed over to the Chadian security forces and transferred to N'Djaména, where they appear to have "disappeared". Unconfirmed reports state that two of the six, Garni Adam and Idriss Gassi, were extrajudicially executed by members of the *Agence nationale de sécurité* (ANS), National Security Agency, in the border town of Agré in Chad, shortly after they crossed the border. President Déby has faced continued armed opposition since he took power in 1990; since his election in July 1996 a number of armed opposition groups are reported to have restated their commitment to overthrowing the government of President Déby by force.

Since President Déby came to power in 1990 there have been hundreds of extrajudicial executions by the security forces - mostly of unarmed civilians. In addition, there have been a number of killings which appear to be extrajudicial executions of critics or opponents of the government carried out by unidentified armed assailants. No investigations have been carried out despite reports that those responsible may have been members of the security forces directly responsible to President Déby. The lack of commitment to investigation suggests that these killings may have been condoned or instigated by the authorities. Since the assassination of Bichara Digui, the authorities are reported to have announced that they are looking for those responsible ; however, it is unclear whether any investigation will take place with guarantees for impartiality and independence.

Chad is currently undergoing a period of electoral reform. Presidential elections, won by incumbent President Déby, took place in June and July 1996 and legislative elections are scheduled for the end of the year. The results of the first round of presidential elections were heavily contested. A number of opposition leaders have been attacked or imprisoned since the beginning of the period of electoral reform. Other opponents and critics of the government, including human rights activists, are reported to have received threats against their safety.

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