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£EQUATORIAL GUINEA

@Arrests since the elections in November 1993

MARCH 1994

AI INDEX: AFR 24/04/94

DISTR: CO/GR/SC

This brief report updates a report published by Amnesty International in February 1994 entitled *Equatorial Guinea: A missed opportunity to restore respect for human rights* (AI Index: AFR 24/01/94), which describes the sharp escalation of human rights violations by the security forces in the run-up to the November 1993 elections, the first multi-party elections since independence in 1968. Since the February 1994 report was written, Amnesty International has received news of further human rights violations in Equatorial Guinea. In early March 1994 the United Nations Commission of Human Rights began to debate Equatorial Guinea under its item 12 (the item that deals with human rights violations in specific countries) during the Commission's 50th session from 31 January to 11 March 1994.

The November 1993 elections, accompanied by large-scale abstentions and allegations of vote-rigging, were won by the ruling *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE), Equatorial Guinean Democratic Party. Since then about 100 people have been arbitrarily arrested and tortured or ill-treated on the grounds that they allegedly failed to vote in the elections. Intimidation of those who boycotted the elections has continued into 1994. In late February 1994 Amnesty International received reports that at least 40 people had been arrested in several districts of the mainland province of Río Muni since the beginning of the year. The organization also learnt of other abuses committed by the security forces including an incident in which a person was reportedly deliberately poisoned to death by police officers in Bata.

Arrests of political activists after the elections

Most of those arrested since November 1993 were suspected or actual members of the eight opposition parties which boycotted the elections. Others were members of an opposition party that obtained the majority of votes in one of the districts in the mainland province of Río Muni. At least 30 people, including three women, **Asunción Micha**, **Isabel Nchama** and **Mercedes Mangue**, were arrested in Niefang, in the centre of Río Muni, in early December 1993 as they were about to hold a meeting to welcome the

leaders of the opposition parties that had boycotted the elections. They were all members of the *Partido del Progreso de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PPGE), Progress Party of Equatorial Guinea. They were released untried after a week but were made to pay a fine. During the period of their detention they were reportedly forced to work from 6am to 6pm repairing roads, for which they received no payment.

At about the same time 20 people were briefly detained in Evinayong, in central Río Muni, where the *Convergencia Social Democrática y Popular* (CSDP), Social Democratic and Popular Convergence obtained the majority of the votes in the November 1993 elections. Apparently they were members of the CSDP.

Human rights violations in early 1994

The arrest of people identified with opposition parties or who refused to vote in last year's elections continued in 1994. While some arrests have occurred in or near the capital, Malabo, on Bioko island, most of the cases reported to Amnesty International occurred in remote areas of Río Muni, where communications with the outside world are difficult and where, consequently, the security forces appear to act with absolute impunity.

In January 1994 four men were arrested in the village of Bareso on Bioko island and accused of "being government opponents", of belonging to the *Movimiento de Autodeterminación de la isla de Bioko* (MAIB), Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island, and for actively calling on villagers to boycott the elections in November 1993. The four, **Diosdado Chale Becha**, **Jesús Angri Noconoco**, **Weka Becucu** and **Becha** (his other names are not known) were briefly held in neighbouring Baney before they were transferred to prison in Malabo where they remained in detention at the end of February 1994. According to reports, the four were severely beaten while in custody in Baney.

In late February 1994 Amnesty International received further reports of arrests and other human rights violations throughout Río Muni. The representative of the *Convergencia para la Democracia Social* (CPDS), Convergence for Social Democracy, in Niefang, **Matías Ela Econg**, was arrested in mid-February when it was found that he had not voted in the November 1993 elections. By early March he was not known to have been released.

In Nnoayong, Evinayong district, at least eight members of the PPGE were arrested after a letter from the PPGE representative in Evinayong which contained their names was intercepted by the police. The eight people were held in Evinayong prison and were apparently still detained in early March 1994.

Other human rights abuses

In the village of Mbeme, in the northwestern district of Mikomeseng in Río Muni, a security police officer shot and seriously wounded **Simplicio Olui Nguema** in a personal quarrel in early February 1994. According to reports, the security officer assaulted Simplicio Olui Nguema who hit the officer in self-defence. Apparently, the officer lost his balance and fell to the ground from where he drew his gun and shot Simplicio Olui Nguema in the head. He then reportedly threatened to shoot all those who had gathered at the scene of the incident. The officer was then reportedly overpowered and disarmed by

two men. When news of the incident reached Mikomeseng, the authorities there sent a contingent of soldiers to Mbeme, apparently with the order to arrest all the villager's inhabitants. At least 15 people were arrested including the two men who had restrained the security officer, **José Odjama** and **Francisco Nvo Beyeme**, and several women including **Juana Mba**, **Margarita Atomo** and **Cándida Edjang**.

The security officer later claimed that the villagers had attacked him because he was a member of the ruling PDGE. However, the villagers were not allowed to give their version of the events. An undetermined number of those arrested were transferred to Bata prison in early March and were accused of stealing the security officer's gun. The authorities' handling of the incident appears to confirm impressions that security police have arbitrary unbridled powers and are effectively never held accountable for their actions before the law.

In late February, **Eliseo Nve Ngomo**, a policeman from Mbini, some 20 kilometres from Bata, died of poisoning after spending two days in prison. The poison was reportedly given to him by two other policemen. Eliseo Nve Ngomo had been arrested two days earlier and accused of giving his gun to the opposition party CPDS. Apparently, Eliseo Nve Engomo believed that his gun had been taken by some of his colleagues who suspected him of being friendly with members of opposition parties. He was held at Bata police station where he was severely tortured. Two days after his arrest, the bodyguard of a government minister and two policemen came to fetch him. They reportedly told Eliseo Nve Ngomo that they were taking him to the home of the chief of police. Instead, according to reports, Eliseo Nve Ngomo was driven to another area of Bata, taken to a bar there and forced to drink some liquor. Immediately, he began to have convulsions and to swell up, at which point the three policemen left the bar. Eliseo Nve Engomo managed to go to his house and his family took him to hospital where he died in the early hours of 26 February. A doctor reportedly certified that he had died of poisoning. No autopsy or judicial investigation into his death has been carried out.

Recommendations

Amnesty International remains concerned about the continuing violations of human rights violations in Equatorial Guinea and the government's evident lack of will to curb the behaviour of the security forces in the whole country. The organization urges the government to:

- stop arresting people for exercising their right to freedom of expression
- stop torturing prisoners and detainees
- carry out an independent and impartial investigation into all human rights violations, in particular those that have resulted in the deaths
- ensure that all those responsible for human rights violations are brought to justice.

KEYWORDS: ARBITRARY ARREST1 / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT / DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL / HARASSMENT / DEATH IN CUSTODY / IMPUNITY / POLITICAL ACTIVISTS / POLICE AS VICTIMS /

WOMEN / ELECTIONS / UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS /

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 8DJ, UNITED KINGDOM
