

## **Equatorial Guinea: Empty graves await people sentenced to death after torture**

Amnesty International's Secretary General Pierre Sané, currently visiting Morocco, today appealed to the President of Equatorial Guinea not to resort to executing 15 people who were sentenced to death on 1 June on the basis of confessions extracted under torture in an unfair summary military trial.

"Other detainees were asked to dig the graves for those present in court on the same day of the sentence and a firing squad had already prepared to shoot them on the beach, near the prison where they are detained," Amnesty International delegates reported on their return from Equatorial Guinea. "Although the President suspended the executions at the very last minute, no one knows how long this suspension will last."

These people were tried last week with some 100 other defendants in a five-day summary military trial that did not respect most of the international standards concerning a fair trial. They were accused of involvement in the 21 January 1998 attacks on military barracks on Bioko Island which led to the death of three soldiers and several civilians. Fifteen people, including at least two tried *in absentia*, were sentenced to death and 40 others received sentences ranging from six to 26 years.

The Amnesty International delegation observing the trial received confirmation that many of the detainees, predominantly members of the Bubi, the ethnic group native to Bioko Island, were detained solely on account of their ethnic origin.

"These people were tried according to summary military proceedings whereas most of them were not caught in the act of carrying out the attacks. This summary procedure led to an aberrant situation where many of the defendants were not even called to give evidence, even though they were on trial for their lives," the two Amnesty International observers said.

The Amnesty International delegation was able to see obvious marks of torture on the defendants, including fractured feet and hands. They also received confirmation from eyewitnesses that at least six people died in detention as a result of torture.

"We have seen at least 10 defendants who had had part of their ears severed apparently with razor blades. One the detainees, Fernando Riloha, had part of both ears cut," the two Amnesty International delegates confirmed.

The women detained after the 21 January attack were also tortured and ill-treated. They were forced to swim naked in the mud in front of all the detainees and some of them were victims of sexual abuse. Although the defendants and their lawyers denounced this systematic use of

torture to obtain confessions during the trial the President of the Court prevented any mention of this issue.

Amnesty International is also concerned that some of the detainees present at the trial were not prosecuted, including three women who were taken as hostages because the security forces could not arrest their husbands or relatives. The organization condemns this practice of hostage-taking and calls for the immediate release of these people.

“Empty tombs are waiting for living people. I urge the President of Equatorial Guinea to leave these sepulchres empty and spare the lives of these people,” Mr Sané said.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the security of the defence lawyers -- both civilian and military -- and other people who agreed to meet the Amnesty International delegation and the international press. The organization is calling on the authorities to ensure their safety.  
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