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## **Sierra Leone: The next six months must see an end to arrests, torture and killings**

The climate of fear and intimidation which has marked the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council's (AFRC) five months in power will continue unless the AFRC takes urgent measures to stop arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, ill-treatment and deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians, Amnesty International said today.

The AFRC came to power following a military coup on 25 May and has agreed to return power to elected President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah by April next year.

While comparative calm has returned to Freetown since the agreement between representatives of the AFRC and other West African countries on 23 October, large numbers of people who have been arbitrarily arrested because of their perceived opposition to the AFRC remain in detention without charge or trial. Although some journalists, who have been particular targets of the AFRC, especially in the last month, have recently been released, at least one, Abdul Kposowa, remains held without charge or trial.

Those who have spoken out against the human rights violations committed by the AFRC have also been victims of arbitrary arrest and detention. Some have had to leave Sierra Leone and those who remain have been severely restricted in their activities because of serious threats to their physical safety. The President of a human rights organization, the Civil Liberties Congress, Sulaiman Banja Tejan-Sie, was tortured following his arrest on 18 August and has since fled Sierra Leone.

On 16 October six vehicles carrying armed men came to the house in Freetown of the Secretary General of the Sierra Leone Section of Amnesty International, Isaac Lappia. He was accused of passing information to the international community and also to the radio station broadcasting on FM 98.1 which supports President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. While Isaac Lappia managed to escape arrest, two other men at the house, known so far only as Moses and Peter, were beaten and arrested.

"We deplore the attacks on those working to defend human rights, including the attempt on 16 October to arrest the Secretary General of our Section in Sierra Leone," Amnesty International said. "We urge the immediate release of all those who have been arbitrarily arrested and detained because of their peaceful opposition to the military coup and the AFRC."

Amnesty International is also protesting against the execution of 10 soldiers on 25 October after being convicted of murder and sentenced to death by a military court. There are fears that further executions may take place.

"While the organization acknowledges the responsibility of the AFRC to uphold law and order in Sierra Leone and prosecute those responsible for criminal offences, the death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment which has never been shown to deter crime more effectively than any other punishment," Amnesty International said. "We strongly urge the AFRC to ensure that no further death sentences are imposed and that no further executions take place."

On 20 October Amnesty International published a 26-page report documenting the serious human rights violations which have occurred since the military coup. The report, *Sierra Leone: A disastrous set-back for human rights*, made specific recommendations to the AFRC for ending these abuses. These recommendations should be implemented urgently to ensure that, during the next six months, the arrests, torture and killings cease.

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