

30 August 2001

AI Index AFR 52/002/2001 - News Service Nr. 153

Somaliland: Detained Sultans should be given fair trial or released

Amnesty International today urged President Mohamed Egal to either bring to trial or release without further delay the four sultans and a supporter currently held in incommunicado detention in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Sultan Mohamed Sultan Abdiqadir, Sultan Mohamed Sultan Hirsi, Sultan Ahmad Sheikh, Sultan Hadi and Abdullah Farar Harbi were arrested in Hargeisa in the early hours of Thursday 23 August and are reportedly being held in Central Prison in Hargeisa without access to a lawyer or their families.

They were reportedly arrested in connection with meetings held by a number of sultans, including themselves, to discuss recent political developments, including the formation of political parties in the run up to elections later this year.

According to Amnesty International's information, none of the five detained have so far been taken to court or charged with any offence. This contravenes the legal requirement that a person suspected of a criminal offence should be brought to court and charged within 48 hours.

"The detainees should either be tried fairly and promptly on recognizably criminal charges or released without delay," An Amnesty International said.

During the arrests a number of people were seriously injured and one person was reportedly shot dead. "President Egal is duty-bound to

organize a prompt, thorough, independent, impartial and public investigation into these incidents," the organization added.

On Thursday 23 August, three unsuccessful attempts were apparently made by the army and police to arrest nine further sultans from the same group of 18, who are currently in a house in Hargeisa. The residence is reportedly guarded by militia allied to the sultans. The house is very near an army barracks and there are fears for their safety in view of the tense situation and the reported presence of members of the security forces in the vicinity. Amnesty International is seeking clarification as to whether their arrests are being sought and if so, on what grounds. It has asked President Egal for assurances for their safety.

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