

0001 hrs gmt Wednesday 8 April 1992

£TOGO: @AI CALLS FOR THOROUGH INVESTIGATIONS AND REFORMS  
A YEAR AFTER MASSACRE

Amnesty International today called on the government of Togo to bring those responsible for past human rights violations to justice.

"Almost exactly 12 months ago today, 28 bodies were dragged from a lagoon near the capital, Lomé," said the human rights organization; "they were demonstrators - killed by soldiers at a time when the government was beginning to accept that changes were overdue in Togo. So far no steps have been taken by the government to bring to justice those responsible for those killings."

Those deaths occurred as political changes and a new era of openness swept through Togo in 1991. A National Conference then reduced the powers of President Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who had led the one-party state since 1967. Past human rights violations were brought to light and openly discussed, with President Eyadéma and the army being publicly accused of responsibility for grave human rights violations.

"But, despite the new light shed on previous events, nothing at all has been done to bring to justice those responsible for widespread human rights violations in the past: in fact, those responsible appear to have been allowed to act with impunity " said Amnesty International. "What is more, nothing has been done to ensure that the human rights violations which once plagued Togo do not happen again."

Among the human rights abuses Amnesty International details in its report are cases of torture and extrajudicial executions - killings by government soldiers operating a shoot-to-kill policy - which were rife in Togo throughout the 1980s. At one army-run detention centre, one prisoner was blinded by being forced to stare at the sun. Others were beaten severely. Many died as a result of the harsh conditions and those who survived left the prison almost skeletal, near death from starvation and medical neglect.

Criminal and political prisoners alike were ill-treated and tortured - sometimes to death. In 1991, witnesses provided testimony that a former Vice-President of Togo, Idrissou Antoine Méatchi, was starved to death over a period of two months in 1984 in a prison in the north of the country.

While many of the abuses have been publicly examined by Togo's National Human Rights Commission, no-one has been brought to justice for violating human rights. Recent attempts by the army to seize power from the transitional government have increased the influence of the military and raised fears that they will prevent a thorough investigation being carried out and frustrate any attempt to bring those responsible to justice.

"Over many years the rule of law has been undermined and abused by those in power in Togo," said Amnesty International. "The current government must act now to bring violators to justice and to prevent torture and extrajudicial executions happening again."

EMBARGOED FOR 0001 HRS GMT WEDNESDAY 8 APRIL 1992