

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index AFR 62/006/2001 - News Service Nr. 56

Embargoed for : 28/03/2001 13:00 GMT

Democratic Republic of Congo: Government must end the torture and killing of opponents.

Amnesty International today challenged Congo's new President Joseph Kabila to publicly demonstrate his commitment to human rights and the rule of law by putting an immediate end to the torture and killing of opponents, and to account for alleged government opponents who were reportedly executed in late 2000 or whose whereabouts remain unknown.

In "Deadly Conspiracies", a new report published today on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Amnesty International said over 100 people from the Kivu region of eastern DRC are currently held incommunicado and are at risk of torture or execution. Most of them have been detained without charge since late 2000 in connection with an alleged coup plot. Several dozen others were arrested in the wake of the assassination of President Laurent-Desire Kabila in January 2001. Amnesty International fears that some of these individuals are being arbitrarily detained simply because they are from the Kivu region.

"Confirmation that 11 Lebanese nationals were killed by unidentified members of the security services around 20 January 2001 highlights the sheer extent to which the rule of law is flouted in the DRC," Amnesty International added.

Other high-profile casualties of these brutal tactics include a suspected ringleader of the alleged coup plot, Anselme Masasu Nindaga, a former member of the coalition of armed groups which brought

President Laurent-Désire Kabila to power in 1997. After earlier denials, the Government is reported to have recently confirmed that he was executed. No further details were given. Other sources had maintained that Masasu and some seven others were executed towards the end of November 2000 in Katanga province, possibly after a summary trial before the *Cour d'ordre militaire* (COM), Military Order Court.

Some top DRC officials appear to have, at the very least condoned, and perhaps actively instigated, some of these executions, apparently as a means of stamping out perceived opposition to their hold on power.

"The killing of opponents was elevated to a tool of government policy under former President Laurent-Desire Kabila. Torture of detainees, to extract information and to inflict arbitrary punishment, became commonplace," said Amnesty International.

"While recognising the right of the government to prosecute suspected criminals, we fear that those detained in connection with the alleged coup plot, or with the assassination of President Laurent-Desire Kabila, cannot expect to receive a fair trial if brought before the *Cour d'ordre militaire*," said Amnesty International.

Since its inception in 1997, COM has attained a notoriety for dispensing summary justice with little regard to international fair trial standards. More than 200 prisoners sentenced to death by the COM have been executed since October 1997. At least 25 people, including civilians, were condemned to death during 2000 by the COM, and at least 35 people are known to have been executed during the year, some within hours of their trial. None were given the opportunity to appeal against their sentence. "We once again urge the government to either reform the COM or to replace it with a court which conforms to international fair trial standards."

In order to safeguard the physical integrity of these detainees, Amnesty International is urging the government to immediately publish the names and whereabouts of all those currently detained incommunicado in connection with the alleged coup plot or assassination and to allow immediate access to the detainees for relatives, lawyers and doctors. While some detainees who "disappeared" from their initial place of detention have recently reappeared, including Aimée Ntabarusha Mungu and her son David Mulume, who are now being held at Kinshasa's main prison, the human rights organization is concerned that many of those who "disappeared" remain unaccounted for.

All allegations of torture and extrajudicial executions should be thoroughly and impartially investigated and suspected perpetrators brought to justice and the victims and their relatives compensated. Such investigations should include the reported extrajudicial execution of 11 Lebanese nationals in Kinshasa in mid-January, Amnesty said.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web :

<http://www.amnesty.org>