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CÔTE D'IVOIRE : ONE YEAR AFTER HIS KIDNAPPING, THE FATE OF GUY-ANDRÉ KIEFFER REMAINS UNKNOWN

One year ago, Guy-André Kieffer, an independent French-Canadian journalist, was kidnapped in Abidjan. His fate remains unknown to this day. Since then, and despite the opening of three judicial investigations, in Côte d'Ivoire, France and Canada, no significant progress seems to have been made in throwing light on this kidnapping.

Amnesty International is concerned that the investigation into the kidnapping of Guy-André Kieffer has made no progress due to unexplained obstacles and blocking by the Ivorian and French authorities. It is urgent that they take all measures necessary for the investigation to be completed and for light to be thrown on the fate of the disappeared journalist.

A journalist specialising in raw materials and economic and financial affairs, Guy-André Kieffer, was last seen around 1 p.m. on 16 April 2004 in the capital's commercial centre. He worked for the French economic daily *La Tribune*, *La Lettre du Continent* and several Ivorian newspapers.

After the journalist's family and *Reporters sans Frontières* (RSF), Journalists Without Frontiers, lodged a complaint and instituted civil proceedings, the French judiciary opened an inquiry into the kidnapping of Guy-André Kieffer and sent the examining magistrate responsible for this case to Abidjan at the beginning of May 2004. In Abidjan, he questioned Michel Legré, an Ivorian businessman, who was allegedly the last person to see Guy-André Kieffer alive. Mr Legré, who is the brother in law of Mme Gbagbo (wife of the Ivorian Head of State, Laurent Gbagbo), provided the names of individuals close to power and the world of finance in Côte d'Ivoire, who he alleged were involved in the journalist's kidnapping.

On 25 May 2004, the same day that some newspapers published this list of names, Mr Legré was arrested in Abidjan and placed in police custody. On 28 May 2004, the Ivorian judicial system charged him with "*complicity in a kidnapping*", "*illegal imprisonment*" and "*murder*", and transferred him to the *Maison d'Arrêt et de Correction d'Abidjan* (MACA) prison in Abidjan. Mr Legré was also charged with defamation by the examining magistrate of the Abidjan high court.

Amnesty International notes with concern that the Ivorian judiciary seems to have initially obstructed the investigation by not facilitating the French examining magistrate's access to the individuals named by Mr Legré. The French magistrate, who returned to Abidjan on three occasions, was later able to question some of the individuals named by Mr Legré, but two security service officers implicated by Mr Legré could not be located.

On 21 October 2004, the French examining magistrate, questioned Mr Legré about the "*kidnapping and illegal imprisonment*" of the journalist, Guy-André Kieffer. On 13 December 2004, he requested

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the temporary transfer of Mr Legré to France for two months, for questioning in France. It would seem that the French magistrate believed that conditions in the prison did not permit him to question Mr Legré with complete freedom.

In the months that followed, the civil parties were unable to find out whether the French government had officially submitted the examining magistrate's request to the Ivorian judicial authorities. In March 2005, RSF called on France to "*stop obstructing*" the transfer of Mr Legré to France. On 14 April 2005, Guy-André Kieffer's wife accused the Ivorian President, Laurent Gbagbo of "*covering up*" for her husband's kidnappers and denounced France's attitude. On the same day, the French ambassador in Abidjan, announced that the request for temporary transfer had been made to the Ivorian authorities on 24 March. It is not known why the French authorities took so long to submit this request, as this only contributed to slowing down the French magistrate's investigation.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Please write letters in French or your own language to the Ivorian Minister of Justice:

- Expressing your concern that, one year after the kidnapping of Guy-André Kieffer, the Ivorian judiciary seems to have done nothing to find the disappeared journalist nor establish the circumstances of this kidnapping;
- Requesting guarantees for the security and freedom of expression of all witnesses to this affair, including the individuals implicated by Michel Legré;
- Requesting information on progress in the investigation of charges made against Mr Legré, who has been detained without trial for around a year;
- Highlighting that the continuing impunity in Côte d'Ivoire can only encourage other abuses of fundamental rights and asking that those responsible for kidnapping Guy-André Kieffer be immediately brought to justice.

Please write letters in French or your own language to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs:

- Asking him to do everything possible to throw light on the kidnapping of Guy-André Kieffer, especially by supporting the requests made by the examining magistrate to the Ivorian authorities.

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Salutation : Madame la Ministre, Dear Minister

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