

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Legal Concern

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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC:

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The 17 people named above were all arrested in the capital, Bangui, between 13 and 17 October 1990 after calling for a national conference to discuss multi-party democracy. They held a public meeting on 13 October to discuss the organization of such a conference. The peaceful meeting was dispersed by the security forces, provoking demonstrations and riots which continued until 15 October, leaving several dozen people injured. None of those arrested is believed to have been involved in acts of violence and none has been charged with any offence although it is almost a month since their arrest. They are held at various police stations in Bangui.

The country's laws on criminal procedure allow the security forces to detain suspects for up to a month, in the case of politically motivated cases, before they are referred to the judicial authorities or released. In numerous cases, however, political detainees have been held for much longer before their cases were reviewed by an independent judicial authority.

Amnesty International is concerned that these 17 people are detained solely on account of peacefully exercising their political rights.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since early 1990 many prominent people, including those 20 arrested on 12 September 1990 and who remain held (see UA 380/90, AFR 19/06/90, 20 September) have made public their demand that a national conference be held to prepare the way for multi-party democracy. Under the terms of the country's 1986 constitution, the country is a one-party state, ruled by the Rassemblement démocratique centrafricain (RDC), Central African Democratic Alliance. In May 1990 President Andre (acute accent on e) Kolingba rejected the demands stating that there was room for all political views within the one party. Several people suspected of supporting demands for the national conference were detained for short periods between May and August 1990.

For several months the proponents of the national conference and multi-party democracy have been writing memoranda and "open letters" to the President about their demands. They have formed what is known as a Coordination Committee for the National Conference. These arrests in October 1990 appear to indicate a further escalation of government repression of demands for multi-party democracy.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the arrest of 17 people, naming some, apparently because they attended a peaceful public meeting called to discuss political reforms in the Central African Republic;
- expressing concern that their arrests, similar to those of 20 people on 12 September, appear to be part of official policy to suppress human rights, in particular freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly;
- requesting information about whether they have been charged with any specific offences;
- urging that if they are imprisoned for having held a peaceful meeting to discuss multi-party democracy, and are therefore prisoners of conscience, they should be released immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence
Général d'Armée André KOLINGBA
Président de la République
Palais de la Renaissance
Bangui
République centrafricaine
Telexes: 5300 PRESICAB RC or 5201 VICEPRE RC
Telegrams: President KOLINGBA Bangui, RCA

Monsieur le Lieutenant-Colonel Christophe GRELOMBE
Ministre de la Défense et de la Justice
Ministère de la Défense
Bangui
République centrafricaine
Telexes: 5298 MINDICA RC
5293 JUSTICE RC
Telegrams: Ministre GRELOMBE, Bangui, RCA

Monsieur Thomas MAPOUKA
Ministre de la Sécurité et de l'Administration du territoire
Ministère de la Sécurité
Bangui
République centrafricaine
Telegrams: Ministre Mapouka, Bangui, RCA

COPIES TO:

Monsieur Laurent GOMINA-PAMPALI
Ministre des Affaires étrangères et de la coopération internationale
Ministère des Affaires étrangères
BP 936
Bangui

République centrafricaine

and to diplomatic representatives of the Central African Republic in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 December 1990.