

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 24/03/00
Distrib: PG/SC

To: Health professionals
From: Medical Office / Africa Program
Date: 4 April 2000

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION
40 prisoners
Equatorial Guinea

Key words: lack of medical care / torture / ill-treatment / death in detention

Summary

Amnesty International is seriously concerned at the health of some 40 prisoners, particularly Miguel Vandi, Cesar Copoburu, Aurelio Losoha, Alejandro Mbe Bitá, Emilio Ribas Esado, Gregorio Bomuagasi and Milagrosa Cheba (f), as a result of torture at the time of their detention for which they received insufficient or no medical treatment. Their health was aggravated by harsh prison conditions. Eight prisoners have already died in pre-trial and post-conviction detention directly as a result of torture. On 3 March 2000, their situation was made worse when they were transferred from prison in the capital Malabo, on Bioko Island, to Evinayong, some 500 kilometres east of Malabo on the continent, making it very difficult for their families to bring them medicine and food.

Recommended Actions

Please send polite letters in Spanish or in your own language:

- expressing grave concern for the health of about 40 Bubi prisoners transferred on 3 March 2000 from prison in Malabo to Evinayong, in particular seeking information about the current health of Miguel Vandi, Cesar Copobur, Aurelio Losoha, Alejandro Mbe Bitá, Emilio Ribas Esado, Gregorio Bomuagasi, Milagrosa Cheba (f)
- urging the authorities to provide all prisoners with enough food and water and adequate medical treatment according to their needs, especially in the cases of the prisoners named above, as provided for by international human rights standards such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners [Article 22];
- urging that the prisoners' physical security be guaranteed;
- seeking information about the medical services available in the prison;
- calling on the authorities to grant prisoners and detainees in Evinayong prison immediate access to international humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 4 May 2000, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

ADDRESSES

Please send your appeals to the following addresses:

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo
Presidente de la República
Gabinete del Presidente de la República
Malabo, Equatorial Guinea
Telegrams: Presidente Obiang, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea
Telexes: 5405 GBNOM 5405 EG
Faxes: + 240 9 3313
Salutation: Excelencia / Your Excellency

Prime Minister Angel Serafin Seriche Dougan
Primer Ministro
Gabinete del Primer Ministro
Malabo, Equatorial Guinea
Telegrams: Primer Ministro Seriche Dougan, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea
Telexes: 5405 GBNOM 5405 EG
Salutation: Sr. Don / Dear Prime Minister

Sr. Don Rubén Mayé Nsue Mangué
Ministro de Justicia y Culto
Ministerio de Justicia y Culto
Malabo
República de Guinea Equatorial

COPIES TO

Please send copies of your letters to the following addresses:

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Santiago Nsobeya Efuman
Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores
Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores
Equatorial Guinea

and to diplomatic representatives of Equatorial Guinea accredited to your country.

PUBLIC

Date: 4 April 2000

MEDICAL CONCERN
40 prisoners
Equatorial Guinea

Amnesty International is seriously concerned at the health of some 40 prisoners, particularly Miguel Vandí, Cesar Copoburu, Aurelio Losoha, Alejandro Mbe Bitá, Emilio Ribas Esado, Gregorio Bomuagasi and Milagrosa Cheba (f), whose lives are in danger because of their poor health, resulting from torture at the time of their arrest, aggravated by harsh prison conditions.

Many of these prisoners are in very poor health and suffering from exhaustion. Nearly all prisoners still have injuries as a result of being severely tortured during the first weeks of detention. They have been held in overcrowded cells, without adequate diets and without access to adequate medical care. Most of them are likely to have survived only because their relatives have brought them food and medicine.

On 3 March 2000, they were transferred from prison in the capital Malabo, on Bioko Island, to Evinayong, some 500 kilometres east of Malabo, making it very difficult for their families to bring them medicine and food. As the prisoners now reportedly have to buy their own food, and only some of them have money to do so, many could soon be nearing starvation. Those named above are thought to be among the weakest of the group.

No official reason has been given for their transfer and their relatives' anxiety was made worse because the authorities had not given official confirmation of the place to which they were being transferred.

History of health of four prisoners

Amnesty International has received information about the following prisoners whose conditions are poor:

- Gregorio Bomuagasi (age 57) had his jaw broken by the police at the time of his arrest in January 1998 with loss of teeth. He was finally sent to a doctor on the eve of the transfer, but was not provided with medication nor did his family have time to buy the prescribed medicine.
- Emilio Ribas Esado (age 70) is suffering from a painful scrotum as a result of being tortured. After months of not receiving adequate medical treatment he was finally sent to hospital for an operation. However, he was sent back to prison after two weeks despite the fact that the doctor had said he needed more time to recover. Consequently, shortly afterwards he had to return to hospital for further treatment.
- Leoncio Kota Ripala has problems with his sight. He remained in a dark cell for one year, together with some other ten prisoners who were also sentenced to death in 1998. Their death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment, but the prisoners were not allowed to leave their cells for more than one hour a day. Ripala's family brought him medicine for his eye condition but the treatment had not finished before the transfer occurred.
- Milagrosa Cheba, a woman, was severely tortured at the time of her arrest. She was sent to hospital on several occasions, but each time was returned to prison before she fully recovered.

Background information

Some 500 Bubis, the indigenous ethnic group on Bioko Island, plus other supporters were arrested after a number of military barracks on the island were attacked in January 1998 in which four soldiers and three civilians were killed. The government blamed the attacks on the Movimiento para la Auto-determinación de la Isla de Bioko (MAIB), Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island, a Bubi political party.

In May 1998 more than 110 Bubis accused of involvement in the attacks were tried by a military court. Fifteen people were sentenced to death (four in absentia), and some 70 people were sentenced to prison terms ranging from six to 26 years. Many defendants, predominantly members of the Bubi ethnic group, appear to have been detained solely on the basis of their ethnic origin. Many had been forced to make statements under torture.

An Amnesty International delegation attending the trial noticed that a number of defendants showed signs of torture. At least six detainees died during pre-trial detention and two others after the trial. Since the sentences were passed, several prisoners have fallen ill as a result of the harsh prison conditions. Most have been denied medical care. One prisoner, Martin Puye, aged 58, a leader of MAIB died in hospital in July 1999, reportedly as a result of ill-treatment and lack of adequate medical care. Another detainee, Digno Sepa Tobachi, "Elako", died in October 1999 also as a result of torture and lack of medical care.