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Equatorial Guinea: Detainees held incommunicado risk being tortured to death

Detainees held incommunicado in Bata, Equatorial Guinea, for their alleged links with a not yet legalized opposition party, are at risk of dying under torture, Amnesty International said today.

Since 14 March, tens of people have been held incommunicado in Bata, the main city in the main continental part of the country, for alleged links with the *Fuerza Democrática Republicana* (FDR), Republican Democratic Force. These include a pregnant woman and three sons of Felipe Ondó Obiang, former parliamentarian and leader of the FDR, who were apparently arrested only because of their family links with the FDR leader.

"Eyewitnesses have seen some of these detainees in prison with visible marks of torture, but they have remained incommunicado for five days and no one knows their whereabouts," Amnesty International said.

Reliable information indicates that many detainees are being transferred regularly from the Bata Public Prison to several unofficial places of detention in Bata, including the Presidential palace "Africa" in Bata and an isolated house on a beach near the village of Utondé (north of Bata airport) where they would be severely tortured.

"The fact that the families are being denied access to their relatives and that nobody knows where they are currently held has led to fears that some of them may already have died under torture," the organization added.

This wave of arrests began on 14 March 2002 when Felipe Ondó Obiang and his brother-in-law Emilio Ndongo Biyogo, member of *Unión Popular* (UP), Popular Union, were arrested in Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea on Bioko Island. Since then, tens of people including Guillermo Nguema Elá, former minister of Finance, member of the FDR and some high ranking military, have been arrested. The arrests have mainly taken place in Malabo and Mongomo, a town near the border with Gabon, where other high-ranking government officials come from, notably the Head of State, General Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo.

The authorities have not officially explained why these people were arrested despite requests from opposition parties. The Minister of Interior only said in a meeting with political parties that they had found evidence of attempts by the FDR to recruit military people to physically attack members of the authorities, including a list of the people targeted by the alleged plotters. The Minister also publicly accused the leaders of the *Convergencia para la Democracia Social* (CPDS), Convergence for Social Democracy, one of the few opposition parties still active, of being linked with the plotters and advocating violence.

"To Amnesty International's knowledge, the CPDS has never called for violence and the organizations fears that the government might exploit the current situation to organize a clampdown on one of the few opposition parties which are still operating in spite of the authorities' harassment," the organization said.

Amnesty International calls the authorities of Equatorial Guinea to release immediately all the people arrested only because of their family links with leaders of the FDR, and notably the niece of Felipe Ondó Obiang who is pregnant and might be in danger while in incommunicado detention. The organization is also asking for the end of the incommunicado detention for all the detainees, to ensure that they are not tortured and that their lawyers know what charges are brought against them.

"The International Committee of the Red Cross should also be immediately given access to the detainees," the organization added. "Any delay could result in severe wounds or even deaths as a consequence of torture."

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