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Amnesty International calls for the release of human rights defenders arrested for their links with the organization

Amnesty International is calling for the release of two human rights defenders arrested in Togo, on 3 May, solely because they were suspected of having provided the organization with information on human rights violations.

"We call for the immediate release of these individuals and for the security of all human rights defenders in Togo to be guaranteed", the organization said today, adding that "they are in prison because they had contact with an Amnesty International delegation last November."

Tengue Nestor and Gayibor François, members of the *Association togolaise pour la défense et promotion des droits de l'homme* (ATDPDH), Togolese Association for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights, were arrested two days before the publication of an Amnesty International report, *Togo: État de terreur*, Togo: Rule of Terror.

"The report was sent to the authorities in advance and these arrests appear to be reprisals against local human rights defenders", the organization asserted.

The two men are accused of "incitement to revolt and defamation of character". They are accused of having acted on the instigation of two opposition parties, the *Convention démocratique des peuples africains* (CDPA), African People's Democratic Convention, and the *Union des forces du changement* (UFC), Union of Forces for Change. A third man, Brice Sant'Anna, who has worked with Amnesty International in the past, is also reported to have been detained.

The Amnesty International report highlights arrests followed by torture which have sometimes led to deaths in detention. The report also refers to hundreds of extrajudicial executions during and after the presidential election campaign of June 1998. Bodies were found on the beaches of Togo and Benin and corpses were seen on the open sea over a period of at least four days.

In the face of these serious allegations, the Amnesty International mission met the Togolese authorities, in December 1998, and stressed to them that impartial and independent investigations

should be undertaken. No satisfactory response was received; the Togolese authorities only replied that they were they were "tired" of Amnesty International.

When the Amnesty International report was published, on 5 May 1999, the Togolese authorities reacted strongly, describing the document as a "tissue of lies" and threatening the organization with defamation proceedings.

Amnesty International maintains its claims based on investigations carried out in the area by three members of the organization last November and December. The Secretary General of Amnesty International, Pierre Sané, will be leading a delegation to Togo from 19 to 23 May 1999. The delegation hopes to meet President GNASSINGBÉ Eyadéma in order to raise human rights issues.

Amnesty International has condemned the recent arrests. It is also concerned by the fact that the police have seized documents belonging to the human rights organization which contain the names of other individuals who could be in danger.

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**For more detailed information, please call the Amnesty International press service: +44
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