

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death in detention

27 September 1990

(See also UA 04/90, AFR 60/01/90, 8 January; and follow-ups
AFR 60/03/90, 6 February; AFR 60/04/90, 21 March; and AFR 60/06/90,
18 June)

BURKINA FASO: Guillaume SESSOUMA, university teacher

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Amnesty International has received unofficial confirmation that university teacher Guillaume Sessouma died as a result of torture in early January 1990, within a week of his arrest.

Guillaume Sessouma was not seen after his arrest on or shortly after on 23 December 1989 and there were unconfirmed reports that he had been ill-treated while held in secret, unacknowledged detention. In response to inquiries, the Burkinabè authorities claimed that he had escaped from detention. Contradictory official statements, however, led to fears that he was in fact detained and may have been ill-treated.

According to unofficial reports, Guillaume Sessouma's body was taken by security officials to a hospital in Ouagadougou in early January 1990, but then taken away to the Conseil de l'Entente building, also in the capital, which has been used as a place of detention. His family has not been officially notified of his death and his place of burial is not known. Guillaume Sessouma was married and had three children, one of whom was born after his death.

Guillaume Sessouma, aged 38, had studied plant biology (physiologie végétale) at the University in Dijon in France and had also undertaken research at the University in Groningen in the Netherlands. As well as teaching at the University of Ouagadougou, he had been Director of the Institut du développement rural, Institute of Rural Development, in Burkina Faso.

Guillaume Sessouma was among a group of 31 people arrested in December 1989 in connection with an alleged conspiracy against the government (see UA 04/90 etc, as above). Those arrested, both civilians and soldiers, appear to have been closely associated with former President Thomas Sankara who was killed in the coup in October 1987 which brought President Blaise Compaoré to power. Guillaume Sessouma and others among those arrested were members of the Union de lutte communiste - reconstruite (ULC-R), Union of Communist Struggle - Reconstructed, a political grouping which had participated in the government of President Sankara.

Amnesty International believes that Guillaume Sessouma may have been a prisoner of conscience, detained solely because of his political opinions.

Judicial investigations began into the cases of 27 of those arrested - the government claimed that four, including Guillaume Sessouma, had escaped - and seven were released uncharged in June, but none of the others has yet been brought to trial.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/airmail letters in FRENCH if possible:

- expressing grave concern about unofficial reports that Guillaume Sessouma died as a result of injuries inflicted in custody after his arrest in December 1989;
- urging that, if he did indeed die in custody, the authorities should acknowledge his death and establish responsibility for it;
- requesting that an official investigation be set up, to be headed by an independent and impartial figure, such as a judge, to hear evidence about Guillaume Sessouma's treatment in custody and to establish exactly what happened to him, and to make its findings public;
- urging that any members of the security forces found to have been involved in torturing or killing Guillaume Sessouma, or colluding in a cover-up of his death, be prosecuted;
- calling on the government, while it is awaiting the results of this inquiry, to take immediate action to ensure that detainees cannot be subjected to torture, in particular by ending the practice of prolonged incommunicado detention.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence Capitaine Blaise Compaoré
Président du Front Populaire
Chef de l'Etat et Chef du Gouvernement

Présidence du Faso
BP 7031
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Telegrams: President Compaoré,
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
Telexes: 5221 prefaso bf

Monsieur le Capitaine Gilbert Diendéré
Secrétaire chargé de la Défense et de
la sécurité

Comité exécutif du Front populaire
Secrétariat général du gouvernement
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Telegrams: Capitaine Diendéré,
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
Telexes: 5555 scge gouv bf

Monsieur André Roch Kaboré
Ministre d'Etat
Secrétariat général du
gouvernement
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Telegrams: Ministre d'Etat
Kaboré, Ouagadougou, Burkina
Faso
Telexes: 5555 scge gouv bf

COPIES TO:

Monsieur Alidou Ouedraogo
Président
Mouvement burkinabè des droits de
l'homme et des peuples (MBDHP)
01 BP 2055
Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso

Monsieur Pierre Waongo
Rédacteur
Sidwaya
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Agence burkinabè de presse

BP 2507
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

and to diplomatic representatives of Burkina Faso in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 November 1990.