

PUBLIC

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UA 30/07 Detention without charge/ill-treatment/prisoner of conscience

CHAD Marcel Ngargoto (m), human rights defender

Human rights defender Marcel Ngargoto has been arbitrarily and unlawfully detained since 31 January 2007. He has not been charged with any offence, and Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. His family have not been allowed to visit him, and he is at risk of serious ill-treatment.

He has been detained by the gendarmerie in his home town of Moissala, in Moyen Chari province, 500km south-east of the capital, N'djamena. He was told that he had been detained because he had been very critical of the gendarmerie in the town, particularly the Commandant, whom he alleged extorted money from local residents.

Marcel Ngargoto is the head of the Chadian human rights organisation *Association des Droits de l'Homme sans Frontières* (DHSF) for the area of Moissala. Until September 2006 he had been working as a journalist for the local community radio station Radio Brakoss, which was often critical of the local authorities' human rights record.

Amnesty International is concerned that the detention of Marcel Ngargoto may be a new stage in the government clampdown on freedom of expression in the country. During 2006, Radio Brakoss journalists were regularly harassed and intimidated by the gendarmerie. On 28 April, the station's director, Tchanguiz Vatankhah, was arrested by the gendarmerie after he issued a statement calling for the 3 May presidential election to be postponed. He was released on 19 May after going on hunger strike for a few days.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In November 2006, the Chadian parliament declared a six-month state of emergency in Moyen Chari and six other provinces, and in the capital. The official purpose of this state of emergency was to stop the fighting between different ethnic groups in Eastern Chad. However, the government used it as an excuse to muzzle and censor the media that were not run by the state.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English or your own language:

- expressing grave concern for Marcel Ngargoto, who has been detained since 31 January in the gendarmerie cell in Moissala, Moyen Chari province;
- urging the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- reminding the authorities that the right to freedom of expression is laid down in international standards to which Chad is a state party, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- reminding the authorities that they must protect basic human rights even during a state of emergency, including the right to freedom from arbitrary detention.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

Pascal Yoadimnadj

Office of the Prime Minister

N'Djamena, Chad

Fax: +235 52 45 40

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre, Dear Prime Minister

Minister of National Defence

Bichara Issa Djadallah

Office of the President

BP 74 N'Djamena, Chad

Fax: +235 51 44 37

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Chad accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 March 2007.