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## **Equatorial Guinea: Arrests undermine free elections**

The recent arrests of opposition party candidates in Equatorial Guinea are a clear attempt to intimidate them and contradict the government's promise of free elections, Amnesty International said today.

More than 10 candidates of opposition parties have been arrested as the country prepares for legislative elections scheduled for 7 March 1999. Some are reported to remain in detention while others are confined to their villages.

The arrests have taken place in the continental part of the country and have targeted especially candidates of the *Convergencia para la Democracia Social* (CPDS), Convergence for Social Democracy.

"CPDS candidates have been detained, prevented from attending electoral rallies and meetings, and expelled from several towns including Añisok and Nsok. Some of those detained have been tortured or ill-treated," Amnesty International said.

Yesterday, the president of the CPDS, Santiago Obam Ndong, its secretary general, Plácido Mikó, and at least three other leaders, Jesús Ela Abeme, Benjamín Mba and Nicolás Mangué, were detained for two hours in Mongomo -- the hometown of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo -- on their way to meet other members of their party in the area. They were forced to beat the wall violently with their hands for half an hour.

On 9 February Francisco Mitogo Nguere, another CPDS member, was arrested in Evinayong, and was beaten with electric cables on the soles of his feet. In the same town, Pablo Obiang Edu, the head of the CPDS list in Akurenam, was detained as he was going back to his town to prepare electoral meetings.

"The opposition candidates detained in connection with their peaceful political activities are prisoners of conscience and must be immediately released, and all reports of torture or ill treatment must be investigated," Amnesty International said.

### **Background**

In Equatorial Guinea members of opposition groups and other suspected political opponents routinely face arrest and torture. Some have been tried unfairly and others have been held without charge or trial.

Amnesty International is also very concerned about the prison conditions of the 80 members of the Bubi ethnic group sentenced by a military court after an unfair trial in June 1998 in connection with attacks on military barracks in January 1998.

Many of them appear to be prisoners of conscience, arrested solely on account of their ethnic origin. They are being held in overcrowded cells in Malabo, the capital of the country, on Bioko Island. Eleven of them, whose death sentences have been commuted, are still held incommunicado and at least two of them are not receiving the medical treatment they need .

Some thirty other Bubis are held without charge or trial in the police station in Malabo. They were arrested in late November 1998 on the suspicion they had helped alleged leaders of the January 1998 attacks to flee the country by boat. All were severely tortured during the first days of detention.

Amnesty International is urging the government to improve the prison conditions of these prisoners and to grant them access to an international humanitarian organization such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

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