

UA 208/98

Fear of torture / Prisoner of conscience

23 July 1998

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

José Oló Obono, lawyer

José Oló Obono, a lawyer who recently publicly denounced the torture of detainees in Equatorial Guinea, was arrested at home and detained on 21 July 1998 at the police station in Malabo, the capital. Torture takes place on a regular basis at the station and six people have died after being tortured since January 1998. There are grave fears that José Oló Obono may also be tortured and ill-treated.

After José Oló Obono's arrest he was stripped to the waist, had his shoes taken away and was verbally insulted in front of his wife, who had followed him to the station. Two lawyer colleagues who tried to visit him the next day were twice denied access to him but his wife was allowed to see him. He is reportedly being treated in a degrading way: he was forced to wash a car and sweep the street and to use a cardboard box in his cell as a toilet.

José Oló Obono and another lawyer, Colonel Lorenzo Ondó Ela Mangué, received anonymous death threats after informing the court of the systematic torture of detainees involved in a trial that took place in May 1998 of those allegedly involved in an attack on military barracks on Bioko Island on 21 January. The attack resulted in the death of three soldiers and several civilians. Colonel Lorenzo Ondó Ela Mangué was sacked from the army shortly after the trial. Amnesty International believes that José Oló Obono was arrested solely for seeking to prevent the court from admitting as evidence statements made under torture and, after the trial, protesting about the harsh prison conditions of these prisoners.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

José Oló Obono and Colonel Lorenzo Ondó Ela Mangué and eight other lawyers defended over 110 people accused of involvement in the January attacks. The military court sentenced 15 people to death (including four in absentia) and some 70 people to prison terms ranging from six to 26 years. Many defendants, predominantly members of the Bubi ethnic group, appeared to have been detained solely because of their ethnic origin. Many of the detainees had been forced to make statements under torture.

An Amnesty International delegation attending the trial noticed that defendants showed signs of torture. At least 10 of them had parts of their ears severed, apparently with razor blades. About 10 women defendants had also been tortured and ill-treated: they were forced to swim naked in front of other detainees and some were sexually abused.

Since sentences were passed on 1 June 1998, several prisoners have reportedly fallen ill as a result of the harsh prison conditions and to have had limited access to medical care. One prisoner, Martin Puye, aged 58, a leader of the *Movimiento para la Auto-determinación de la Isla de Bioko* (MAIB), Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island, died in hospital on 14 July, reportedly as a result of ill-treatment and lack of adequate medical care in custody. Other prisoners are thought to have been denied hospital treatment.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- asking for the immediate release of José Oló Obono, a prisoner of conscience detained solely for seeking to prevent the court from admitting as evidence statements made under torture and protesting about harsh prison conditions;
- seeking assurances that he is not being tortured or ill-treated and that he has access to his family, legal council and medical care;
- expressing concern about the prison conditions in which those sentenced in the May 1998 trial are being held;
- urging the authorities to provide all prisoners with enough food and water and adequate medical treatment if necessary;
- reminding the Equatorial Guinea Government of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 5: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" and calling for an independent and impartial enquiry into reports of the torture of detainees held in connection with the attacks on military barracks in January 1998.

APPEALS TO:

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo
Presidente de la República
Gabinete del Presidente de la República
Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Telegrams: Presidente Obiang, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Telexes: 5405 GBNOM 5405 EG

Faxes: + 240 9 3313

Salutation: Excelencia / Your Excellency

Prime Minister Serafín Seriche Dougan

Primer Ministro
Gabinete del Primer Ministro
Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Telegrams: Primer Ministro Seriche Dougan, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Telexes: 5405 GBNOM 5405 EG

Salutation: Sr. Don / Dear Prime Minister

Secretary of State for Security, Colonel Manuel Nguema Mba

Secretario de Estado para la Seguridad Nacional
Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Telegrams: Colonel Manuel Nguema Mba, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Telexes: 5405 GBNOM 5405 EG

Salutation: Sr. Don / Dear Secretary of State

COPIES TO:

Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Miguel Oyono Ndong Mifumu
Vice-Primer Ministro y Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores
Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores
Equatorial Guinea

and to diplomatic representatives of Equatorial Guinea accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 September 1998.