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GUINEA-BISSAU: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES THE INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH OF ASYLUM-SEEKER EXPELLED FROM SPAIN

Amnesty International today welcomed the appointment by the Spanish Government of a special envoy, Marcos Vega, a senior Ministry of Interior official, sent to Guinea-Bissau to investigate the circumstances of the killing by police of an asylum-seeker expelled from Melilla, a Spanish enclave in Northern Africa.

“This appointment could lead to clarification of the circumstances of the death of the expelled asylum-seeker and of the injuries sustained by some of the other expellees”, Amnesty International said. “However, we believe that the responsibility of the Spanish Government for the situation of the refugees is much greater and we are concerned that as yet Spain shows no sign of respecting this.”

Ahire Naruna Awaifo, a 25-year-old Nigerian, was shot and killed by police in Bissau on 23 September 1996 during a violent demonstration. He and 44 other Africans expelled with him, were protesting against the way they had been treated in Spain and Guinea-Bissau.

During the demonstration another Nigerian, David Adekoro Damelokum, was shot in the arm and taken to hospital. Two other expellees who had reportedly been badly beaten were also hospitalized.

Ahire Naruna Awaifo had applied to the Spanish police for asylum as a political refugee but the police reportedly failed to process his request in defiance of both Spanish and international law.

The 45 African nationals who demonstrated in Bissau were among 103 people from different African countries expelled in Spanish military aircraft in June 1996 from Melilla and Malaga. Fifty of them, including some known asylum-seekers, were deposited in Bissau where they were immediately detained in the *Segunda Esquadra* prison where some were beaten.

The Spanish Government has admitted that some of the expellees were given water containing sedatives during the flight. Amnesty International has also received reports that they were handcuffed in the aeroplanes and some were beaten by Spanish police officers. In the three months since their imprisonment in Bissau, Spain has made no effort to help the expellees, many of whom are reportedly ill, malnourished and penniless.

Amnesty International has repeatedly requested the Spanish Government to respect its obligation under international law to examine individually the petitions of all asylum-seekers under the conditions and guarantees contained in national and international refugee law. Amnesty International has requested the government to transport all the expellees back to Spain and to examine their petitions for asylum in order to comply with its legal obligations. ENDS.../