

EXTERNAL

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Legal concern / fear of ill-treatment

24 December 1996

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Picas Damane
Charles Blé Goudé
Souleymane Kamarate
Sylvanus Goré - student activists

Picas Damane, deputy secretary general of the *Fédération estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire* (FESCI), Ivorian Federation of Student and School Pupils and three other FESCI leaders have been held incommunicado since 19 December and Amnesty International fears that they are at serious risk of ill-treatment. All of them appear to be prisoners of conscience, detained because of their membership of FESCI, an organization which the government claims has been outlawed.

The four were arrested the day after violent clashes between security forces and students demonstrating about scholarship payments. Despite the fact that it was not clear that FESCI was responsible for the violence, the four leaders were arrested while they were in the office of the Minister of Security, where they had been invited to discuss this and other issues raised by this student organization. The arrest of the four FESCI leaders may be linked to incidents which took place last week during the funeral of a former FESCI leader, Jean-Pierre Koukougnon who died in London and whose corpse had been sent back to Côte d'Ivoire to be buried there.

The four FESCI leaders are currently being held in the basement of the Police Headquarters (*Préfecture de police*) in Abidjan. They are being denied access to a lawyer, a doctor and their families. They are not known to have been charged with any criminal offence.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

FESCI, which campaigns for better student conditions, has been faced continual harassment for several years. In September 1995 nine FESCI members, including Guillaume Soro, the organization's secretary general, were held incommunicado for more than one month before appearing in a very weak condition on television where they made a public apology, apparently under pressure. They were all released without charge some days later. At a press conference held at the time of their release, the then Minister of Security, General Gaston Ouassénan Koné said that the Ivoiran government considered FESCI to have been dissolved in 1991 and that "*in future anyone claiming to be a member of FESCI will be considered an outlaw*". Following these public threats, some of its leaders were obliged to go into hiding.

In May and August 1996, two press conferences held by FESCI at the Youpougou university campus in Abidjan were forcibly broken up by security forces who beat and ill-treated the students, some of whom were briefly detained. Last year, in a similar incident, a visitor to the student campus, Sylvie Anoma, was allegedly raped by a member of the security forces. Despite the lodging of a formal complaint, to date no official inquiry is known to have been carried out.

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

- expressing concern that four student members of the *Fédération estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire* (FESCI), arrested on 19 December, are being held in incommunicado detention, which provides no safeguards against torture and ill-treatment, in Abidjan;
- urging that the detainees be allowed immediate access to legal representatives, their families and, if necessary, medical treatment;
- expressing concern that some or all of the student leaders arrested may be prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their non-violent political activities and urging the authorities to release these prisoners if they are not to be charged promptly with recognizable criminal offences and given a fair and public trial within a reasonable period of time.

APPEALS TO:

President

Son Excellence
Henri Konan Bedié
Président de la République
La Présidence, Boulevard Clozel, Abidjan
République de Côte d'Ivoire

Fax: +225 21 1425

Telegrams: Président Bedié, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Telexes: 23754 PRESID CI OR 23169 PRELIT CI

Salutation: Monsieur le Président/Dear President

Prime Minister

M. Daniel Kablan Duncan
Premier Ministre
Le Primature, Abidjan
République de Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: Premier Ministre, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre/ Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Justice

M. Brou Kouakou
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
Boulevard Angoulvant, BP V107, Abidjan
République de Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Telexes: 23752 MINAFET CI (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/ Dear Minister

Minister of Security

M. Marcel Dibonan Koné
Ministre de la Sécurité
Ministère de la Sécurité
Boulevard Angoulvant, Abidjan
République de Côte d'Ivoire

Fax: +225 21 3981

Telegrams: Ministre Sécurité, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Minister for Higher Education

M. Saliou Touré

Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur
Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur
Abidjan
République de Côte d'Ivoire

and to diplomatic representatives of Côte d'Ivoire accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 February 1997.