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Nigeria: Killings by security forces in Northern Nigeria

Amnesty International today condemned the illegal killings by the Nigerian security forces during the recent fighting in the north of the country and called on the Inspector General of Police to publicly state that anyone responsible for illegal killings during operations in Northern Nigeria will be brought to justice.

Amnesty International also called for an investigation into the killing in detention of Mohammed Yusuf, believed to be the leader of the Boko Haram sect, by Nigerian security forces on Thursday 30 July.

Amnesty International said that anyone responsible for illegal killings should be brought to justice, including officials with chain-of-command responsibility who order or tolerate illegal killings by those under their command.

Amnesty International opposes all unlawful killings, whether committed by armed forces under the control of the government or armed groups. Illegal killings by armed groups do not absolve governments of the responsibility to conduct security operations in a manner that does not lead to illegal killings by state security forces themselves.

Nigerian security forces have a history of carrying out extra-judicial executions, torture and other ill-treatment.

Although the government claims to have a zero-tolerance policy on extrajudicial executions and torture by the police, there are consistent reports that the Nigeria Police Force executes detainees in custody, suspected armed robbers under arrest, people who refuse to pay bribes or people stopped during road checks. Amnesty International has also spoken to many family members of people arrested and detained by the Nigerian police and whose whereabouts are now unknown. The organization fears that the missing individuals have been executed.

The Nigerian military are also frequently involved in extra-judicial executions and other human rights violations, particularly in the Niger Delta, where they carry out law enforcement functions. The use of excessive force by the military when dealing with clashes is a frequent occurrence, often resulting in the death of bystanders.

Background

Fighting broke out in Bauchi on Sunday 26 July 2009 when armed men reported to be members of a religious sect, Boko Haram, attacked a police station. Subsequent attacks on police and government targets are reported to have been carried out in Borno, Yobe, Kano and Katsina states.

A police station was set fire to on Monday 27 July in Potsiskum, Yobe State. On Wednesday 28 July, the police reported they had killed 30 people.

Phone lines in effected areas are not working properly and Maidaguri, Borno State, one of the worst affected areas, was closed by security forces on Wednesday 29 July.

On the morning of Thursday 30 July it was reported that 200 alleged members of the Boko Haram sect were killed by Nigerian security forces when trying to flee Maidaguri.

According to information received by Amnesty International, there have been at least 55 deaths and 176 arrests in the city of Bauchi alone.

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