

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Togo: The UN Must Act Now: Appoint a Special Rapporteur and Protect Witnesses.**

The Secretary General of Amnesty International, Pierre Sane, has called on the United Nations to appoint, immediately, a Special Rapporteur on Togo and to create a witness protection program.

Speaking at a press conference in Paris today, in response to the findings of the joint Commission of Inquiry set up by United Nations and the Organization of African Unity into systematic human rights violations in Togo, he urged that the Commission's recommendation to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Togo be promptly implemented.

"This recommendation, formulated for the first time, would constitute a decisive step towards the prevention of renewed human rights violations in Togo," he added.

Mr Pierre Sane expressed concern about the safety and protection of witnesses who testified before the Commission, as the Togolese government has a history of attempting to silence witnesses. In this connection, he called for "a prompt response to the Commission's recommendation that the international community provide financial support to enable the UN Human Rights Commission to set up a mechanism to monitor the safety of witnesses."

The Commission's findings show that "a situation of systematic human rights violations existed in Togo" during and after the 1998 elections. Amnesty International asserted that "hundreds of people were extrajudicially executed [and that] bodies were retrieved from the beaches of Togo and Benin." The Commission findings hold that "The many testimonies collected support the claim that, during 1998, several fishermen saw, while fishing 'out at sea' a large number of floating bodies."

Amnesty supports the Commission's recommendation that further investigations be carried out by experts.

Amnesty International is pleased that the Commission has not only confirmed the main findings of report but has made recommendations which, if implemented, will address the culture of impunity in Togo. The organization pointed to last weekend's violent dispersal of pro-democracy demonstrations in Lome by the police, as confirmation that there is a correlation between elections and human rights abuses in Togo. "It is essential that the Special Rapporteur be appointed in time to play a preventive role in the run up to elections in October 2001," Mr. Sane added.

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