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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Elections in Nigeria marred by violence

Widespread violence has left dozens dead in clashes between supporters of rival candidates, and seen several incumbents assassinated in the lead-up to Nigerian elections in April. Political parties and candidates reportedly have been involved in the brutality, arming supporters and inciting violent conflicts with complete impunity. Violence has been used by most parties to retain or acquire political power or support, and the Nigerian government has done very little to prevent it.

Aye Dememba, a candidate for governor in Ekiti State, was shot and stabbed by armed men who forced their way into his home in August 2006. Eight people, including a member of the Board of Trustees of the ruling People's Democratic Party and the personal assistant to the then Ekiti State Governor, have since been arrested for the murder. One of the suspects arrested reportedly claimed that he was commissioned by an aide of the then State Governor.

In November 2006, several hundred human activists, allegedly politically motivated, were carried out in Bayelsa, Delta and Edo states, killing at least one person. As increasing fear of firearms into Nigeria and the creation of armed vigilante groups have emboldened politicians to encourage political violence at local and state levels. Law enforcement authorities have failed to take adequate steps to protect human rights.

Constitutional violence in Nigeria is often politically motivated, particularly when tribal backgrounds or other factors are exploited by candidates during electoral campaigns. Armed gangs in the oil-producing Niger Delta are reported to be forging links with politicians ahead of the 2007 elections, fueling fears of increased carnage in a region already affected by pervasive violence and human rights abuses.

Despite recent statements by some security officials and other authorities that violence will not be tolerated, and occasional arrests, most election-related disturbances are not investigated and go unpunished.

The Campaign for Violence-Free Elections – a coalition of 27 Nigerian civil society and international organizations including AI – was launched in Lagos on 22 January. The coalition calls on all stakeholders, including the Nigerian state and federal governments, political parties and candidates, to publicly declare that they will not tolerate violence and human rights abuses before and after the elections. To date four opposition parties have pledged their support.

ACT NOW! Write to President Obasanjo (Obasanjo), calling on him to ensure that he leaves a legacy of peaceful elections by taking clear and unambiguous steps to stop politically motivated violence. Call on him to initiate independent, transparent and effective investigations into cases of political violence and human rights abuses in the context of the elections, and to ensure that suspected perpetrators are brought to justice without further delay. To sign the petition to support violence-free elections in Nigeria go to www.amnesty.org/actnow



Poster for 2007 Nigerian elections which have already been labelled by violence.



AIK leads a demonstration in Downing Street, London, calling on the UK government to categorically condemn torture.

UK still deports to states known to use torture

The UK deported two men in January to Algeria where they risk torture and other ill-treatment because of their purported involvement in Al terrorism. With no conclusive evidence against the men, the UK authorities nevertheless branded them as threats to "national security" and used this as grounds to expel them from the country.

The UK circumvented its obligations to its torture people to states that practice torture by claiming to have obtained assurances from the Algerian authorities that the men would be treated humanely and would benefit from amnesty measures.

However, following their deportation to Algeria, Reda Dendani and another Algerian man, known for legal reasons only as "YI", were held virtually incommunicado by an Algerian intelligence agency for approximately 12 days. They were then charged with "participation in a terrorist network, operating abroad", and remained in custody.

Another Algerian man, Mustapha Taleb (formerly known as "YI"), faces deportation back to Algeria despite having fled torture there and gaining refugee status in the UK. He was among a group of men charged, tried and eventually acquitted in 2005 of all charges in the UK in connection with an alleged conspiracy to produce poisons and explosives. After his acquittal, he was released from custody in April 2005, where he had been held for more than two years. He was later re-arrested and held pending deportation to Algeria on "national security grounds".

Mustapha Taleb appealed to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) – the controversial court presiding over such matters in the UK – against being labelled a "national security" risk in the UK and asserting that his return to Algeria would expose him to a real risk of torture.

AI monitored Mustapha Taleb's SIAC hearing. It appeared that the UK authorities' case against him amounted to the same charges brought against him in his earlier criminal trial – charges of which he had already been acquitted. Three jurors from Mustapha Taleb's criminal hearing wrote to AI expressing their shock at this. "This is contrary to anything we thought could be possible in a democratic free society. Since January 2003, 'YI' (Mustapha Taleb) has been persecuted by our government beyond all realms of imagination."

In reaching its decision, SIAC also relied on secret intelligence provided by the UK authorities that was not disclosed to Mustapha Taleb, his lawyers or the public. The SIAC proceedings effectively denied Mustapha Taleb a fair hearing and made it impossible for him to refute the state's assertion that he posed a risk to "national security". SIAC also ignored the near certainty that Mustapha Taleb could be tortured if returned to Algeria.

Despite this, the UK has reached agreements, or Memorandums of Understanding, with states that routinely practice torture, including Jordan, Lebanon and Libya. And it has stepped up its deportations of so-called "national security suspects" to these countries.

One such "suspect", known as Abu Qatada, lost his appeal against deportation on "national security" grounds in February. SIAC disregarded ample evidence that Abu Qatada faces a real risk of torture and other ill-treatment if returned to Jordan. After levelling serious charges against men alleged to be "national security" risks, the UK authorities state that they do not have enough admissible evidence to bring criminal proceedings against them. Instead, they rely on deportation as a legitimate expedient. The UK claims that diplomatic assurances, including Memorandums of Understanding, are enough to protect deportees from human rights abuses, and fulfil its obligation under international law. The evidence, however, suggests otherwise.

Inside



War on terror special issue

Worldwide Appeals

- Unfair trial of journalist in Azerbaijan
- Woman forced to divorce in Saudi Arabia
- Flawed justice in USA
- Students' fate unknown in Nepal

First step to justice for the people of Darfur

On 27 February the International Criminal Court (ICC) presented evidence against two Sudanese men suspected of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur. This latest development comes a year and a half after the investigation into such crimes in Darfur was opened.

Current State Minister for Humanitarian Affairs Ahmad Haman, and removed Janjawid leader Ali Muhammad Ali Abdolrahman (also known as Ali Kushayb), face 51 counts of alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, the destruction of property, pillaging, rape, torture, outrages upon personal dignity and other inhumane acts. The presentation of evidence against Ahmad Haman is particularly significant as it marks the first time the ICC is seeking to prosecute a current government official.

However, on hearing of the ICC's accusations, Sudan's Minister of Justice, Mohamed Ali Al-Madi, reportedly declared: "The ICC has no jurisdiction on us or any Sudanese." He added: "The Sudanese government will not allow any Sudanese to be tried and punished outside the national justice framework."

On 4 March, Sudan announced that it would start trial proceedings in a special criminal court in Geneina, West Darfur, against three people, including Ali Kushayb, on charges relating to attacks in the region. The ICC can only prosecute individuals if a state refuses or is unable to do so itself. Sudan's moves to try Ali Kushayb suggest an attempt at undermining the ICC's jurisdiction in this case.

The ICC has no police force with which to execute warrants if suspects do not comply with summonses. It relies on the willingness of states or peacekeeping operations, such as the African Mission in Sudan of the African Union (AMIS), to arrest suspects and surrender them to the ICC. However, the AU has refused, for more than a year, to sign an agreement to do so.

With Sudan refusing to co-operate, the onus now lies with the international community, including the AU, to ensure that if the suspects are indicted, they comply with the warrants. If there is no follow-up action to the warrants, victims and their families will continue to be denied justice and reparations.

Over two million people have been displaced in the Darfur conflict. Some 85,000 people have been killed and thousands of women have been raped since the conflict began.



Top: Sudanese refugees from Darfur return to Garga refugee camp, Chad, after fleeing Darfur. Bottom left: AMIS and (right) AU women demonstrators gather in Khartoum to demand an end to the rape of girls in Darfur in September and December 2006.

Rio de Janeiro's Governor must respect election promises in Brazil

"Instead of putting the candidate in the limo, let's solve their real causes of the problem." Sérgio Cabral in an election statement, *O Povo* newspaper, 31 October 2006



In February, Rio de Janeiro state police forces and members of the elite National Public Security Force invaded the favelas of Complexo do Alemão, Rio de Janeiro. At least six people, including children, were killed during the operation which included the use of an armoured car known as the *carrinho*. After a three-day gun battle police withdrew, claiming to have seized over 600 weapons.

During the 2006 elections the current Governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sérgio Cabral Filho, criticized the use of *carrinhos*, seen as symbols of a violent and discriminatory public security policy which undermines poverty.

It is essential that changes in public security policy based on human rights, police intelligence, thorough investigations and social policies are implemented in Rio de Janeiro.

ATTNOW!

Send a postcard to Governor Sérgio Cabral, calling on him to stand by his election promise and end the use of armoured vehicles in policing operations in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro now.

Postcards are available from postcard@attnow.org or write to: Emma Jo Greenwood, Sérgio Cabral Filho, Palácio Guanabara, Rua Paqueta Machado, 4/n, Laranjeiras, 22238-900 Rio de Janeiro - BR.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS



People's consultation

The Control Arms Campaign, run jointly by AI, UNISA and Oxfam, is holding a People's Consultation to encourage as many governments as possible to submit positive and strong recommendations to the UN in support of an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

The UN passed the resolution to adopt an ATT in December 2006, with 153 governments voting in favour.

Governments are now being asked to submit that views to the UN on the "feasibility, scope and parameters for a comprehensive, legally binding instrument, establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms."

It is calling on states to include in their submissions the golden rule: "Arms transfers should not be authorized where they will be used or are likely to be used for gross violations of international human rights law." This will give the Group of Governmental Experts a broad mandate when it begins its work in 2008 to discuss how to proceed on establishing an ATT. To find out how you can support the People's Consultation and take action, go to www.controlarms.org

control arms

NEWS IN BRIEF

Women's rights demonstration quashed in Iran

Over 30 women activists were arrested on 4 March while staging a peaceful demonstration outside Iran's Revolutionary Court in the capital. At the time of writing, all the women have been released except Shah Saeed and Mahboubeh Akhavanfardizadeh, both active in campaigns to stop executions by stoning. All considered both women to be prisoners of conscience.

The activists were protesting at the trial of five women charged in connection with a peaceful demonstration calling for equal rights for women under Iran's law. Held last June, that demonstration was violently dispersed by security forces, who arrested at least 70 people. These detained on 4 March included four of the five women who were arrested as they left court.

Many of those arrested were active in the Campaign for Equality, launched in August 2006 to transfer women's rights activists, which aims to collect a million signatures from Iranian in support of changes to the law to end legalized discrimination against women. Their website has frequently been filtered by the internet, making it difficult for people in Iran to access it. The women were planned to campaign for their internationally recognized right to equality on 8 March, International Women's Day. The arrests may have been an attempt to prevent planned events from taking place.

See the film March 2007 and International Women's Day: Irene Khan and Shahn Ehsani call for an end to discrimination against women in Iran (MOE 13/02/2007).

Iran executions

Eight Iranian Arab men were executed in Iran in January and February. They had been convicted after unfair trials of being involved in bomb attacks in October 2005.

All four in the list of other prisoners who are reported to have been sentenced to death following unfair trials.

See Iran: Death sentences - appeal case: 11 Iranian Arab men facing death sentences (MOE 13/02/2006).

Libya



Five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor (Ladwin) were condemned to death for a second time in December 2006. After a second grossly unfair trial, they were convicted of knowingly infecting hundreds of children with HIV in a hospital in the city of Benghazi. The six claim that confessions used in evidence against them were extracted under torture. Evidence produced by Libyan medical experts was questioned by international medical experts, who were not allowed to testify.

All agree the authorities in resisted the death sentences. Only a fair trial will uncover the truth about this tragedy, bringing justice to the children who were infected and the families of the more than 50 who have since died.

See the film May 2006.

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