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Open letter to the Togolese authorities

Since 5 May 1999, when the last Amnesty International report on human rights violations in Togo was published (*Togo: State of Terror*), the human rights defence organisation has been approached on numerous occasions by persons claiming to be "intermediaries", "unofficial emissaries" and even "close associates" of the Togolese government.

On a regular basis, these people say they want to negotiate with Amnesty International in order to "put an end to this culture of conflict with Togo", to quote one of them. Some even go so far as to state that Amnesty International should not oppose a meeting with the Lomé authorities, implying that the organisation is ready to reconsider the contents of its May report.

In a desire for transparency and in order to clarify matters, Amnesty International is therefore publishing this "open letter to the Togolese authorities" through the Togolese press and wishes to make the following points:

- Amnesty International has always been open to dialogue, and continues to be so. This is why, on 21 May last, the organisation attempted to visit Togo to study with the government the means of best protecting and promoting human rights in Togo. This attempt at dialogue resulted in the delegation led by the Secretary General of Amnesty International being turned back at the Togolese border, despite prior assurances given by the highest Togolese authorities that the Amnesty International mission would be welcomed in Togo. Since then, a number of the intermediaries who have contacted us have stated that the President of Togo "has made dialogue a constant feature of any action he takes". Amnesty International welcomes this position and regrets that it was not able to be put into practice during the failed meeting in May.
- Amnesty International has never negotiated human rights. Amnesty International does not negotiate human rights. Amnesty International will never negotiate human rights. The organisation recalls that the Togolese government has ratified, amongst others, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and the African Charter for Human and Peoples' Rights. Amnesty International therefore calls on the government to meet its international obligations by putting an end to impunity in Togo, bringing to justice those suspected of human rights violations perpetrated in Togo for more than three decades and ending the harassment to which human rights defenders in Togo have been subjected, in particular since publication of Amnesty International's last report on Togo. These are the Togolese government's obligations. As for the rights of the Togolese people, they are inalienable and non-negotiable.

- If the Togolese government wishes to meet one or more representatives of Amnesty International, it can put such a proposal directly to the organisation's head office in London. It does not need to use intermediaries.

Furthermore, we wish to inform Togolese public opinion that Amnesty International is not an organisation whose aim is "confrontation". On the contrary, the only aims pursued by the organisation are a search for truth and justice for the victims of human rights violations throughout the world. This is something the organisation does without compromise and it will never give way to intimidation.

In the so-called Togo-Amnesty International "affair", we would like to record that it is the Togolese government which, following publication of the report on 5 May, arrested Togolese human rights defenders Tengue Nestor and Gayibor François, that it is the government which arrested Nadjombe Koffi, Campaign Director of the Togolese Section of Amnesty International, that it is the Togolese government which refused to allow the Amnesty International delegation to enter the country, it is the Togolese government which has failed in its duty to punish those who are guilty of the crime of torturing Ameen Ayodele, member of the Nigerian Section of Amnesty International.

Similarly, it is the Togolese government which has harassed, intimidated and forced into exile members of ACAT *Association des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture* Association of Christians for the Abolition of Torture and members of the Togolese Section of Amnesty International. It is the Togolese government which has decided to pursue in the Togolese courts the Secretary General of Amnesty International, who has been summoned to appear before the court in Lomé on 15 November.

So if there is any "impasse or culture of confrontation", it is not the fault of Amnesty International.

The organisation upholds the information contained in its report of 5 May and continues to demand that an independent and impartial international committee of inquiry be set up. In Togo, the time has come to put an end to impunity and call those responsible to account.

As for dialogue, we repeat that we are available for a frank and transparent exchange, with a view to greater protection for human rights in Togo.

Signed: Maina Kiai
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For further information, please call Amnesty International's Press Office in London, UK, on +44 171 413 5566. You can also visit our web site at: <http://www.amnesty.org>