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TOGO 2022

Armed groups and security forces killed villagers at the border with Burkina Faso. The rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly were restricted on the pretext of containing the spread of Covid-19, and security. The right to freedom of expression was threatened. Arbitrary arrests and detention were documented. The president promulgated a law to protect students from sexual violence.

Background

Togo was reviewed under the UPR process on 24 January.

Armed groups continued to attack villages and members of the defence and security forces in the Savanes region bordering Burkina Faso, where the state of emergency imposed on 13 June for 90 days was extended for six months on 6 September.

Unlawful killings

On 14 July, the army publicly acknowledged that overnight from 9 to 10 July, “an aircraft on night patrol had mistakenly targeted a group of people it mistook for a column of moving jihadists” in Margba village in the prefecture of Tone near the border with Burkina Faso in the Savanes region. Seven children were killed in the air strike, according to non-government media.

In a statement on 16 July, the Ministry of Defence stated that overnight from 14 to 15 July “unidentified armed individuals carried out coordinated and complex attacks in several villages” in the Savanes region, with a toll of “several deaths and some injuries”. Non-governmental media reported that more than 10 people were killed by the armed group.

Freedom of assembly and association

The authorities used the pretext of national security to ban several assemblies organized by opposition political parties, while ruling party events were authorized. On 22 June, the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection banned a scheduled assembly of a coalition of opposition parties stating that “holding such a protest, in the current worrying sub-regional and national security context, marked in particular by volatility and unpredictability, is likely to compromise ongoing efforts to preserve public order and national security”. On 29 June, the prefect of Agoe-Nyieve used the ministry’s rationale to ban a scheduled gathering of the National Alliance for Change, an opposition party.

The government continued to impose the ban on gatherings of more than 15 people, introduced to fight the spread of Covid-19. It was maintained despite the government’s announcement on 22 February that places of worship would be reopened, and all sporting activities resumed for those who could provide proof of vaccination, given the drop in infection rates since 1 February. On 8 March it welcomed there being “no Covid-19 patients in treatment centres”.

Freedom of expression

In June, the website belonging to the NGO Togo Debout was inaccessible for a week, after it published a report on impunity in Togo.

On 11 July, the High Authority of Audiovisual and Communication summoned the director-in-chief of the daily newspaper Liberté following a front page article alleging that the deaths of seven children in Margba village could have resulted from an army “blunder” (see above, Unlawful killings).

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

On 24 February, the government responded to a letter from three UN Special Rapporteurs regarding allegations about Abdoul Aziz Goma’s “arbitrary and prolonged detention”. The authorities refuted the arbitrary nature of his detention and maintained their accusations against Abdoul Aziz Goma, an Irish citizen of Togolese origin, that he was part of a “group of people who were planning armed operations to destabilize the institutions” in Togo. He had been charged along with others of “undermining the internal security of the State”. He denied the accusations and said he had simply been covering accommodation costs for young people who wanted to visit Lomé to participate in peaceful protests. The Special Rapporteurs considered him to be a human right defender. He remained in detention at the end of the year.

Several teachers and students were arrested and detained in connection with strikes for improved working conditions. Three leaders of the Togo Teachers’ Union were arrested in April accused of inciting students to revolt. They were provisionally released on 5 October after several civil society organizations mobilized in their support. Also in April, five students were arrested during demonstrations in the Savanes region, and were charged with “destruction of public and private property” and “disturbance of public order”. They were provisionally released on 17 October.

On 16 May, in the context of attacks by armed groups, dozens of members of the Fulani ethnic group were arbitrarily arrested in Timbou town in the Savanes region. They were detained by the Timbou, Dapaong, Biankouri and Cinkassè military forces without access to a lawyer, photographed and released on 20 and 21 May without charge.

Sexual and gender-based violence

On 2 December, the president promulgated a law to protect students from sexual violence. Provisions included penalties for perpetrators of sexual harassment, cyber sexual harassment and rape. It allowed pregnant students to attend school, and granted free legal aid and forensic examinations for rape survivors.

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