

URGENT ACTION

OPPOSITION MEMBER RISKS FURTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Gabonese political opposition member, Bertrand Zibi Abeghe, has alleged that he was subjected to ill-treatment while in detention after a mobile phone was found in his cell at Libreville central prison. He has since been moved to a cell block notoriously known for over-crowding and where prisoners are held in the dark with no access to sunlight.

Bertrand Zibi Abeghe, a member of the opposition 'Coalition pour la Nouvelle République', was allegedly beaten up by prison guards on 15 January after they found a mobile phone in his cell. His lawyers who visited him on 17 January have reported that his nose was wounded and he had bruises on his back and soles of his feet after the beating. As further punishment, Bertrand has been moved to a different cell block named 'CB' at Libreville central prison. This cell block is notorious for over-crowding and prisoners are detained in the dark all day, every day.

Bertrand was arrested on 31 August 2016 in the wake of protests against what the opposition termed as fraudulent election results. He was taken to the General Research Directorate and questioned about his alleged 'unlawful possession of fire arms' among other things. He was detained there for two weeks and charged with 'crime against public peace', 'criminal association', 'involvement in acts that could create public trouble', 'demonstrations against State authority', 'involvement in acts of violence', 'non-assistance to endangered person' and 'unlawful possession of fire arms' and transferred to Libreville central prison. Bertrand's lawyers have argued in court that there is no substantial evidence to support the charges against him. Three separate bail applications made for Bertrand have been rejected by the High Court of Libreville.

Although the Prosecutor allowed Bertrand to be seen by a private doctor on 29 January, there are growing concerns that he is at risk of further ill-treatment as it is not the first time there has been allegations that he has been beaten up while in prison. In November 2016, his family reported that Bertrand's face and feet were swollen and they believed he had been beaten up while in detention.

During the first two months of his detention, Bertrand was denied access to his family. He was again denied family visits from 2 January 2018 after a human rights activist, Marc Ona posted a Facebook message on behalf of Bertrand whom he had visited in prison together with Bertrand's partner. The President of the High Court of Libreville reinstated Bertrand's family visits on 29 January.

Please write immediately in French or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to conduct prompt, independent and impartial investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment he has been subjected to and bring all those suspected to be responsible to justice;
- Urging them to ensure that Bertrand has regular access to his family and lawyers and ensure he is not subjected to further torture and other ill-treatment while in detention;
- Urging them to end all forms of intimidation and harassment against political opposition members and human rights defenders in Gabon, including through the misuse of the criminal justice system.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13 MARCH 2018 TO:

Minister of Justice

Francis Nkea Nzigue

P.O. Box 547

Libreville, Gabon

Salutation: Dear Minister

Public Prosecutor

Steve Ndong Essame

Phone: +24106058245 (TEXT ONLY)

Salutation: Dear Public Prosecutor

President of the Tribunal

Fulgence Ongama

Phone: +24106245490 (TEXT ONLY)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HER EXCELLENCY MRS AICHATOU SANNI AOUODOU, Embassy of the Gabonese Republic, 27 Elvaston Place SW7 5NL, 020 7823 9986, Fax 020-7584 0047, www.gaboneseembassy.org

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bertrand Zibu Abeghe was a former member of the National Assembly for the ruling party, Parti Démocratique Gabonais (PDG). He publicly resigned on 23 July 2016 and left the ruling party during a campaign tour by presidential candidate Ali Bongo in his constituency, Bolossoville constituency in Woleu-Ntem province. Bertrand is also a member of the opposition 'Coalition pour la Nouvelle République' which constitutes of several opposition political parties that supported Jean Ping to vie against Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba.

On 31 August 2016, it was announced that Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba had won the elections with 49.8 per cent of the votes against 48.23 per cent of his main rival, Jean Ping. Jean Ping's camp said the election was fraudulent and challenged the results in one of the country's nine provinces. This immediately sparked demonstrations in the capital Libreville. In response, security forces stormed Jean Ping's party headquarters. The opposition said at least two people were killed and several were wounded during the raid. Bertrand Zibu Abeghe was arrested along with others. A government spokesman said the raid was launched to find "armed criminals" who had allegedly set fire to the country's parliament earlier that day - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/09/gabon-security-forces-must-stop-using-excessive-force-amid-postelection-tension/>

Presidential candidate Jean Ping has continued to contest the results of the August 2016 Presidential elections, and in September 2017 he was temporarily denied the right to leave the country.

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