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# Amnesty Calls on Rawlings to Abolish Death Penalty

**The ten year reign of the Rawlings military dictatorship has been indicted for several murders, political imprisonment without trial, torture and the unrestrained use of intimidation of all sorts to silence its political opponents. That is the verdict of *Amnesty International*, the London based international human rights organisation.**

Since Rawlings came to power after the 31 December coup, his regime has tortured, murdered, imprisoned and killed so many that to call this dictatorship "democratic" is like awarding the Nobel peace prize to Hitler. And yet, the supporters of this monstrous dictatorship, including the foreign press, the British and United States governments, and foreign sympathisers of the regime have in the past dismissed the cries of Ghanaians as petty.

If these were petty, then an organisation of repute such as *Amnesty International* will not stick out its neck so far. And yet, its recent report on Ghana makes very interesting reading. The report, **"Ghana: Political Imprisonment and the Death Penalty"** is carefully written, and contains facts and figures which Ghanaians will find helpful, fascinating, but sad.

Sad that a government which they supported cautiously, a government which promised revolution, salvation, respect for individual liberty, and the return of political power to the oppressed classes should turn round and commit acts of unmitigated aggression and unnecessary murder against innocent citizens. Sad that Rawlings, Kojo Tsikata, Kwesi Botchway and others who have benefited from free speech and the rights of the individual should now frown on the same principles.

There is no precedent to what the Rawlings dictatorship has done. But it would be a serious mistake to see this as the sole work of Rawlings and his notorious scheming murdering cousins and siblings. All other PNDC functionaries who have tainted their hands with blood should be held accountable as well.

But why has Rawlings decided to imprison and kill so many? The report does not provide an answer, and indeed, that was not its brief at all. But the report shows that claims by PNDC officials such as Nana Akuoko Sarpong (a Lawyer, Chief and Secretary for Interior) that Ghana has no political prisoners is a figment of their warped imagination. The report takes the reader from 1983 through to the 1992, and shows a pattern of consistent abuse of the rights of Ghanaians.

Names of those imprisoned for political reasons (some have been released, others are still held) include **Kwesi Armah, Nana Okutwer Bekoe, B.B.D. Asamoah, Major Courage Quarshigah, Kwesi Pratt, John Ndebugre, Jacob Jabuni Yidana.**

The story of **Agnes Quicoo,** whom Amnesty describes as "the mother of a security police officer who was detained in connection (with the Quarshigah affair)...but who escaped detention in May 1990, has reportedly been detained without charge or trial since June 1990". What is the reason for her detention? According to Amnesty, her detention is due "solely on account of her relationship to her son; in effect, she appears to be imprisoned as a hostage." This woman has "been held incommunicado - members of her family and elders from her village have been refused access to her - and is believed to be suffering health problems". Under Rawlings, mothers can be detained for the 'crimes' of their sons and daughters. That is Rawlings.

According to the report, "between 1983 and 1986, at least 90 people were charged and tried in political cases, of whom 50 were sentenced to death and at least 23 executed". The report also notes that "Ghana has had a high rate of executions in the last ten years, no more than 260 people having been sentenced to death and over 90 executed. Apart from murder and treason which are capital offences under PNDC laws, armed robbery, 'sabotage of the economy' corruption by senior government and judicial officials, and smuggling of certain products also carry the death penalty.

But if Rawlings is sincere, then he should sign his own death warrant. By his own indices, he is guilty of all the offences mentioned above. He overthrew a constitutional government, he has sabotaged the economy of Ghana by mortgaging our economy to the IMF and by selling Ghana's diamonds and gold cheaply and fraudulently.

Rawlings own fraudulent behaviour is now well known and no one expects him to behave with decency. But to continue



*Akuoko Sarpong: A consistent liar*

to kill, torture and murder people at this rate is frightening. It was the silence of the world that led to the carnage committed by African brutes such as General Idi Amin (Uganda), Emperor Bokassa (Central Africa Republic) and Sassou Ngueso (Equatorial Guinea). It is the hypocrisy of the world that is making Rawlings, the only mass murderer ever to rule Ghana.

But even as Rawlings murders his way through Ghana's history, the UK Overseas Development Minister, Lynda Chalker is still bolstering the regime. Recently, Lynda Chalker gave Rawlings £1m ostensibly to help him in his transition efforts. But to those who suffer under the Rawlings dictatorship, this is like saying to Rawlings, "Well done for killing so many...well done for torturing your own people, and well done for serving his majesty's government so well". What next - Lynda Chalker?

The Amnesty Report also makes the same demands which pro-democracy, anti-dictatorship forces have been making for a long time. That is; "the immediate repeal of all legislation which allows unlimited administrative detention without safeguards - that is, arbitrary detention - in particular the 1982 Preventive Custody Law, PNDC Law 4, and the 1984 Habeas Corpus (Amendment Law), PNDC Law 91. Amnesty International is also appealing for an end to the use of death penalty, and as a step towards its aboli tion, a reduction in the number of capital offences. That is the cry of many Ghanaians. But Rawlings has blood on his hands and cannot stop craving for more. Only his overthrow can bring back the sanity which Ghanaians cry for daily.

• Review by Zaya Yeebo

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