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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN TOGO

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The past year started with the overthrow of the High Council of the Republic, a democratic transitional institution; later on, a presidential election of questionable validity took place. Legislative elections are set for February 6 and 20, 1994. However, failure of the government to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms remains widespread.

BACKGROUND

Togo is a country in which human rights violations have often been perpetrated by the armed forces. Their aim has been to stifle opposition and end the process of democratization. In 1992, the ground gained by democracy was lost. In January 1993, General Eyadema ended the period of transition to democracy and took the country in hand. Under criticism for its violence and without the sanction of the presidency, the armed forces began a process of ethnic cleansing within its ranks in the spring. For these reasons, 250, 000 Togolese took refuge in Benin and Ghana. Opposition and presidency nonetheless negotiated the holding of a presidential election on August 25. Having lost confidence in the process, the opposition finally decided to withdraw from it. Several international NGOs rejected the validity of the election. The Canadian government nonetheless believes that dialogue must be continued and the election process announced for January 1994 resumed.

The absence of restraints upon the military casts some doubt on whether the judiciary is capable of acting independently.

The political climate in Togo has seemingly placed even further constraints on the already tenuous freedom of the press. Some journalists were arrested when their newspaper claimed that the President of Togo was "illegitimate." The government has better access to the public media than its opponents do. With limited success, foreign missions have been attempting to restore equal access for all parties.

The political climate does not lend itself to the realization of women's and children's rights, which have been curtailed by the lengthy strike that has paralysed the economy since 1991.

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