Association Togolaise des Expulsés (ATE) – the Togolese Association of the Deported

Les expulsé(e)s ne sont pas oublie(e)s! The deported people are not forgotten!

By Gerit Boekbinder

Togo: Flight, migration and deportation
Migration and flight are an important part of life for many people in Togo. The past 20 years there were several great waves of flight. Many Togolese people in opposition were forced to save themselves after the downturn of the mass revolts against the regime of military dictator Eyadéma. The last of such waves of flights was in 2005 after the actual president Faure Gnassingbé had taken the power from his dead father Eyadéma inspite of mass uprises and international protests. At the same time, like other countries of francophone West Africa, the economic crisis and lack of perspectives increased from the early 90ies caused by the devaluation of the CFA Franc forced by European currency policy. Most Togolese migrants and refugees went to the neighbouring countries, i.e. Ghana or Benin, some reached Europe. Migration has become an indispensable economic resource for the Togolese society. Money transfers from migrants supply living funds for many families, parts of infrastructure, houses as well as a large number of social projects. These transfers considerably exceed what is delivered by the so-called development aid.

Although the reasons to leave Togo have by no means changed and many Togolese people, especially youths, dream of a better perspective for their lives in Europe only few people succeed to arrive there because of a sophisticated border regime. The chances for Togolese refugees to be granted asylum in most states of the EU are extremely small since the Togolese regime is attested a continuous „democratization“ process. On the other hand many Togolese refugees have been deported in the last few years into a country where their economic perspectives are disastrous and where they are even today menaced by persecution.

Self-organization and self-aid
To Sokodé (central Togo) deported men and women started in 2008 to organize themselves and founded the “Togolese Association of Deported” (Association Togolaise des Expulsés ATE). They attempt to improve their living conditions and to be heard in the society. Given their bad economic situation and a lack of job perspectives the ATE members, as a first step, deal with practical aid and set up an agricultural project to provide a source of supply and income for deported people. In this context they plan to carry out courses and workshops where knowledge in cultivation and cattle breeding as well as use of computers and internet will be procured. In Sokodé ATE is working together with other basic initiatives, for example with children and youths clubs caring for girls’ and women’ access to education and rights and for better medical care and health education.

ATE also aims at other forms of practical aid: it wishes to meet deported people after their forced arrival at Lomé airport and to supply them with medical aid and a place to stay for the beginning. In cooperation with anti-racist activists in Germany it wishes to support them in claiming reimbursement of their payments to the social insurance system or to restore contact to family members from whom they were separated by deportation.

A Voice for the Deported
In the long run ATE attempts to make the desperate situation of the deported people in Togo a subject of public discussion and to support by this the struggle of anti-racist groups in Europe against deportation to Togo. ATE is also in contact with the “Malian Association of Deported

People” (Association Malienne des Expulsés AME) from Mali where self-organized groups of deported people today are an important factor in civil society. In Togo with the lasting experience with a dictatorial regime, it is obviously much more difficult as compared to Mali to establish a social protest movement. There is also a lack of such experience caused by the repressive political climate lasting for decades. In order to spread the experience from their political struggle and to become stronger AME presently is trying to establish all over West Africa cooperations between organizations and social movements dealing with migrant rights – also ATE and other groups from Togo are intended to be part of this cooperation.

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