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Guinea-Bissau : Freedom of expression is under attack in the aftermath of an army rebellion

Amnesty International is calling on the government of Guinea Bissau to protect the human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, of political opponents. " All the civilian detainees should be released immediately and unconditionally unless they are charged and tried in compliance with international standards of fair trial" said Amnesty International.

Several opposition politicians were arrested between 24 and 26 November 2000 in the capital, Bissau, accused of supporting the rebellion led by General Ansumane Mané, the former leader of the disbanded Military Junta which ousted former President João Bernardo Vieira in May 1999.

In the evening of 26 November, President Kumba Ialá, ordered that the detainees be released from prison and placed under house arrest. However, they remain in detention.

Several members of the *União para a Mudança*, (UM), Union for Change opposition party, including Aminé Saad, former Procurator General; Manuel Rambout Barcelos, Carambá Turé, a member of Parliament were arrested at different times on 25 November. Agnello Regala, director of Bombolón radio and UM member, was arrested at about 1.20 am on 26 November. The previous evening he had denounced the arrests of the opposition politicians and the attacks on freedom of expression. The president of the *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), African Party for the independence of Guinea (Bissau) and Cape Verde, Francisco Benante was also among those arrested.

The president and the spokesperson of the *Aliança Socialista da Guiné* (ASG), *Socialist Alliance of Guinea* (Bissau), respectively Fernando Gomes -formerly president of the Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League - and Fernando Mendoça were arrested on 26 November.

The detainees have not been formally charged. Two of the detainees, including Fernando Gomes, were reportedly beaten at the time of their arrest.

Background

Following the appointment of army officers by President Kuamba Ialá, General Ansumane Mané, who objected to it , revoked the appointments, dismissed the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and his deputy and ordered their arrest, and proclaimed himself chief of staff of the armed forces.

On the early hours of the morning of 23 November, fighting erupted briefly in Bissau between army factions loyal to the government and General Ansumane Mané's supporters. The rebellion was soon quelled by forces loyal to the government and many of General Ansumane Mane's supporters were arrested. The General himself remains at large.

The UM and the PAIGC had publicly blamed the government for the tense situation in the country following the appointments of military officers.

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