

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: AFR 30/006/2009
24 June 2009

Guinea-Bissau: Respect for human rights is essential during the elections

On the eve of Presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau on Sunday 28 June, Amnesty International calls on candidates, the government and the security forces to publicly commit to respect human rights during the election process and beyond. The government and the security forces must ensure that the armed forces do not violate human rights and that those who do are brought to justice.

The current atmosphere of insecurity and fear, brought about by intimidation, persecutions, arbitrary arrests and torture of armed forces critics and real or perceived political opponents, is not conducive to the free exercise of expression. Furthermore, it prevents people from exercising their right to take part in the conduct of public affairs freely and without fear.

The elections will be monitored by international observers from the Economic Community of West African States, African Union, European Union and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries. Amnesty International is calling on election observers to also monitor the observance of human rights during the elections.

The authorities have reportedly said that elections would be held in an atmosphere of respect for human rights, but so far, no investigation has been initiated into the unlawful killing of four people, including a presidential candidate, on 5 June and some journalists have received veiled threats. At least one journalist was briefly detained and questioned by the armed forces about an article he wrote. Presidential candidates are afraid for their security and this is hampering their ability to campaign freely. One candidate even withdrew from the presidential race. Several politicians and parliamentarians remain in hiding fearing arrest and torture by the armed forces.

Military personnel continue to arbitrarily arrest and torture people close to the late President Vieira or close to those killed on 5 June. At least two people were arrested during the week of 15 June. They were taken to a military establishment and tortured before being released without charge. In addition, those who were arbitrarily arrested on or immediately after 5 June remain without charge or trial in military custody, in violation of national and international law.

Amnesty International calls on the Guinea-Bissau authorities including the armed forces to:

- protect and respect the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom of the media to seek, receive and impart information;
- ensure that candidates have freedom to campaign without fear and voters can exercise their rights free from intimidation and harassment;
- respect the outcome of the elections;
- investigate all incidents of human rights violations by the security forces during the elections and to bring those suspected of being responsible to justice;
- investigate as a matter of urgency the unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests and torture of 5 June.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK

www.amnesty.org