

Public Statement

11 December 2001

AI Index AFR 30/017/2001 - News Service Nr. 219

Guinea-Bissau: Amnesty International concerned about arrests after alleged coup attempt

Amnesty International is concerned about the wave of arrests of former military personnel in the aftermath of an alleged coup attempt in Guinea-Bissau last week.

On 3 December 2001, the Guinea-Bissau authorities announced that armed forces and police had foiled a coup attempt the night before, and that several former military officers and paramilitary personnel had been arrested. These include former Deputy Army Chief of Staff, Almane Alam Camará, and former Navy Chief of Staff, Mohamed Lamine Sanha, who are alleged to have led the coup attempt.

At present there is little detailed information about the alleged coup attempt and the authorities apparently have not yet provided evidence to support the claim, nor released information about the number of people detained, their names and the places of detention. However, the authorities announced that the arrested included military officers who had previously been involved in another alleged military revolt against the government in November 2000.

Amnesty International today called on the Guinea-Bissau authorities to ensure that the human rights of all detainees are protected. The organization also reminded the authorities that those detained in the aftermath of the alleged coup attempt should be released immediately and unconditionally unless they are promptly charged with a recognized criminal offence and tried in compliance with international standards of fair trial.

Background

In November 2000, at least 200 military and paramilitary officers -- including Almane Alam Camará and Mohamed Lamine Sanha -- and 10 civilian leaders of peaceful political opposition parties were arrested following an alleged coup attempt. The alleged leader of the coup, Brigadier Ansumane Mané, was subsequently killed in disputed circumstances. The civilians were released on bail within a week, without having charges brought against them. Restrictions remain imposed upon them, including being prevented from leaving the country and having to report to the police or courts periodically.

The military officers remained in prison for about seven months, in conditions which constituted cruel and inhuman treatment. Many contracted life threatening illnesses in detention, while the health of others -- already suffering from chronic diseases -- deteriorated. They were released on bail in May and June 2000. They have not been charged. However, they still have to report to the authorities daily.

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Last updated : December 10