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## **Senegal: New government must end decades of impunity for human rights violations**

The new Senegalese government must demonstrate its commitment to safeguarding human rights by addressing the rampant impunity which undermines the judicial system and the rule of law, Amnesty International said today.

In a report entitled ‘Senegal: An agenda for human rights’, Amnesty International highlights key challenges the new government must overcome to ensure human rights are enforced, respected and protected.

“After years of impunity, the population has great expectations regarding justice,” said Gaëtan Mootoo, Amnesty International’s West Africa researcher.

At least six people were killed in January and February 2012 by security forces when they violently repressed demonstrations opposing the candidacy of the outgoing President. The unrest fuelled other serious human rights violations such as protesters being arrested and tortured.

“During the pre-election period the security forces used methods such as arbitrary detention, beatings, simulated drowning and electric shocks to repress protesters,” said Mootoo.

Ibrahima Fall was arrested on 17 February 2012 in Tivavouane (around 90 km northeast of Dakar) while returning from a demonstration. He told Amnesty International:

“They got me to lay face down and hit me with batons, water hoses and electric cables... Another threatened to kill me with the handle of an iron baton. He also threatened to rape and murder my mother. The man told me: ‘Here, we hit you, we kill you and this will go nowhere and we won’t be judged,’.”

Many of those guilty of these acts appear to benefit from the protection of their superiors. In many cases this amounts to a tacit authorisation of torture.

In the past two decades, to Amnesty International’s knowledge, hardly any investigation into allegations of human rights violations committed by Senegal’s police and gendarmerie (paramilitary police) have led to those accused of these acts being brought to justice and receiving sentences proportional to the gravity of these crimes.

This also applies to the 30-year conflict in Casamance in which both the government security forces and armed groups have committed countless atrocities for which no-one has been held accountable.

“The new authorities must put an end to the culture of impunity that serves as both weapon and shield for security forces,” said Gaëtan Mootoo. “The victims of human rights violations and their families deserve justice and reparation.”

The new authorities have pledged to put an end to impunity. The new Senegalese Minister of Justice, Aminata Touré, stressed publicly several times that victims of recent human rights abuses were entitled to justice and reparation and that the authorities were determined to prosecute those responsible for these violations.

The new Senegalese authorities have also announced the establishment of a working group ‘to reflect upon the practical preparation and organization of the trial of former Chadian President Hissène Habré, in accordance with Senegal’s international commitments and with the support of the African Union’.

This is a welcome development after years of procrastination during which the previous Senegalese governments have avoided bringing him to trial. Habré is accused of committing serious human rights violations in his country.

Amnesty International hopes that these positive signs are acted upon and that this will put an end to decades of impunity and bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice.

“The authorities must live up to their promises and turn their back on practices which constitute a negation of all of the human rights commitments made by Senegal,” said Mootoo.

“Only then will Senegal become a state governed by the rule of law, not just on paper but in the daily life of its people.”