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Guinea: Details of violence emerge; Amnesty calls for international commission of inquiry

Amnesty International today revealed details of the brutal attacks committed by security forces in Guinea, during the suppression of a mass rally on 28 September in Conakry, and the extent to which the violence was organized by the army.

Eyewitnesses told the human rights organization that several women were publicly raped by soldiers, including “red berets” - the Presidential Guard. Sources revealed to Amnesty International that many of the victims were killed by the Guinean security forces, who were deliberately ‘shooting to kill’.

One source told Amnesty International: “I saw bodies hit in the chest and head, some were shot in the back. Many were hit at close range.”

One of the demonstrators told Amnesty International: “The soldiers ripped the skirts off the women, leaving them naked. They hit them with truncheons and Kalashnikovs. I saw two soldiers throw a woman on to the ground and publicly rape her in view of the demonstrators. I was afraid. I saw a soldier rape a naked woman with his truncheon.” Another witness added that he saw a soldier pouring beer on a woman the soldier had just raped.

According to several eye-witness statements gathered by Amnesty International, the attacks were organised by army officers. Witnesses said that several members of the presidential guard were present and supervised the repression. One of them told Amnesty International that these officers “pointed their fingers at the demonstrators and cried ‘shoot them’.”

Several witnesses reported the presence of a government minister among the security forces.

One witness told Amnesty International: “A young person, aged about 18, wearing a Lacoste T-Shirt and blue jeans fell, other people trampled him underfoot, he tried to get up, he hit the ground and moved his head. A soldier asked for him to be ‘finished off’ and another soldier took out a dagger and cut his throat.”

Amnesty International is calling for an international commission of inquiry to investigate the human rights violations carried out in Conakry.

The organization also called for an immediate halt to all supplies of security and police equipment to the Guinean government that could be used to commit serious human rights violations until the Guinean government has taken practical steps to prevent such violations by the security forces and has brought to justice those responsible for these acts.

One demonstrator told Amnesty International: “The crowd had already entered the stadium. People were assembled on the steps. Soldiers including “red berets”, gendarmes and police officers surrounded the stadium, then small groups of the security forces entered the stadium. They threw tear gas grenades and, hardly ten minutes later, they fired live rounds at the demonstrators, aiming initially at those right in front of them on the pitch.”

Amnesty International has also learned that some people, including women, were arrested during the demonstration and are still being held by the security forces. The organization is concerned that these detainees may be subjected to ill-treatment.

“The perpetrators of these brutal attacks must be identified and brought to justice,” said Erwin van der Borgh, Director of Amnesty International’s Africa Programme. “This can only be achieved through an international inquiry, as the Guinean authorities have already been discredited by their lack of political will to carry out a national investigation into accusations of human rights violations by security forces in 2007.”

Notes to editors:

- On 28 September 2009, several thousand demonstrators assembled in a Conakry stadium in response to a call by the “Living Forces” (political parties, trade unions and civil society), to show their opposition to the candidacy of the head of the junta, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, in the presidential elections planned for January 2010. The junta had banned the demonstration on the previous evening but the opposition had maintained its rallying cry.

- Captain Moussa Dadis Camara took power in a coup after the death of President Lansana Conté in December 2008.

- This excessive and deliberate use of force is the habitual response of the Guinean authorities when their power is contested. During the last ten years, the Guinean security forces have regularly fired live rounds at peaceful demonstrators who were demanding political and social reforms. In 2007, more than 130 people were killed and more than 1,500 wounded during the violent repression of demonstrations, most of which were peaceful. Despite the creation of a commission of inquiry, it never started work and nobody responsible for these acts has been punished or brought to justice.

- Only provisional details have been received about the number of people killed and wounded on 28 September. Amnesty International is continuing to collect information about those killed, women raped in public, protesters beaten and injured and missing persons.