

AI Index: PRE01/192/2012  
13 April 2012

## **Guinea-Bissau: Coup attempt underscores human rights concerns**

A military takeover in Guinea-Bissau underscores the country's serious unresolved human rights concerns, Amnesty International said today.

Ongoing tensions within Guinea-Bissau's military bubbled over on Thursday night and today when members of the armed forces placed parts of the capital Bissau under lockdown, arresting former Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior as well as the interim President Raimundo Pereira and his wife.

Stalled investigations into killings of political and military figures since 2009, an urgent need for reform of the security forces, and suspicions that several military officers and other officials are involved in international drug trafficking are just some of the concerns that threaten peace, security and stability in the West African country.

"The reports from Bissau are unsettling, but instability has sadly been on the cards for some time, with rampant impunity and a lack of progress in the investigations into the killings of political and military figures since 2009," said Erwin van der Borgh, Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

Amnesty International is also concerned for the safety of Guinea Bissau's civil society members, some of whom have gone into hiding. Since presidential elections in March, several NGO leaders have received anonymous death threats by phone.

At least one journalist, Antonio Aly Silva, was arrested this morning for publishing photos of the military outside the house of former Prime Minister Gomes. Soldiers reportedly beat Silva before taking him to the cells in the Navy Headquarters, where he is still being held.

"The military must immediately release political leaders and anyone else in their custody, and must respect the rights and physical integrity of all those detained," said Erwin van der Borgh.

Following reports of an attempted coup in late December 2011, political instability in Guinea-Bissau was exacerbated when former President Malam Bacai Sanhá died in January from diabetes-related complications.

Extrajudicial killings in recent months have also fuelled the insecurity.

On 27 December 2011, the Rapid Intervention Police extrajudicially executed Iaia Dabo, a former security officer, as he was on his way to turn himself in to the judiciary police.

Amid the presidential elections on 18 March 2012, just hours after the polling stations closed, soldiers killed Colonel Samba Djalo. Along with former navy chief Zamora Induta, the colonel had been deposed and arrested by soldiers in April 2010. Both men were released without charge in November 2010.

Fearing for his life after Samba Djalo's killing, Zamora Induta took refuge in the EU headquarters in

Bissau.

In July 2011, thousands of people marched in the capital to protest against the lack of progress in investigating the 2009 political killings. They also demanded the resignation and prosecution of Prime Minister Carlos Gomes and others whom they accused of being responsible for the killings.

In April 2011, the weekly newspaper *Última Hora* was forced to close after it published an article citing an unpublished official report implicating a naval Chief of Staff in the 2009 killing of President Vieira.

“For Guinea-Bissau to regain stability and move forward based on the rule of law, there is a pressing need to tackle human rights issues including freedom of expression, the lack of accountability for human rights violations and ensuring reparation for past abuses,” said Erwin van der Borgh.

“In the meantime, we urge the military to respect human rights and halt the unlawful detention of journalists and politicians. They must reveal how many people have been detained as well as their whereabouts and conditions of detention. All detainees must be protected from torture and other ill-treatment and given adequate medical attention where necessary.”