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Guinea-Bissau: Increasing repression in wake of military coup

Growing restrictions on protesters, the media and freedom of movement are fuelling fear and insecurity in the wake of the military coup in Guinea Bissau, Amnesty International said.

“Increasingly repressive measures are being employed by the military as they try to stifle mounting criticism within the country and internationally,” said Marisé Castro, Amnesty International’s Guinea Bissau expert.

Sources in the capital city Bissau told Amnesty International that military check points and road blocks have sprung up around the city – particularly along the road to the airport – and vehicles are being stopped and searched.

Spontaneous, peaceful demonstrations by women and young people have been violently repressed by the military in recent days.

Over the weekend some protesters were beaten with guns by soldiers and one protestor was reportedly stabbed in the leg and is now in hospital in a serious but stable condition.

All private radio stations were shut down in the immediate aftermath of last Thursday’s military take over. Those that attempted to reopen were again taken off air if they criticized the military.

The national broadcaster meanwhile is back up and running but under the army’s control.

“Amnesty International calls on the military authorities to respect and protect human rights including the rights to freedom of movement, peaceful assembly and expression,” said Marisé Castro.

The organization is also calling for the immediate release of former Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior and interim President Raimundo Pereira who have been detained since the 12 April coup.

Both men were transferred to Mansoa Barracks, about 60km north of Bissau on Saturday and the conditions of their detention remain a cause for concern. Reportedly, both men are being held incommunicado in a mosquito-infested small cell with no water or toilet facilities.

Carlos Gomes Júnior suffers from diabetes and requires daily medication which was denied, causing him to become ill on Saturday.

Amnesty International has not been able to confirm whether or not, following negotiations, the Red Cross was allowed to visit and provide him with the necessary medication.

Human rights defenders and other civil society members, many of whom had received anonymous death threats after the elections in March, have been in hiding in fear for their lives following the military take over.

Some government ministers also went into hiding to avoid arrest and soldiers seeking them beat and threatened their relatives, associates and employees.

“It is not at all clear how many people have been detained. The military authorities must release information regarding the number of arrests, and the names and whereabouts of those arrested,” said Marisé Castro.

“It is unacceptable that civilians are living in fear for their safety. We are receiving reports that residents of Bissau are leaving the city and the price of food is increasing. This situation cannot be allowed to deteriorate further.”