

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

15 February 2001

AI Index AFR 30/003/2001 - News Service Nr. 28

Guinea-Bissau: Soldiers held in appalling conditions

The 124 military and security officers detained in Guinea-Bissau, following a challenge to the authority of President Kumba Ialá, are being held in "appalling conditions" according to Amnesty International. "We know that at least 55 of them are seriously ill," said a spokesperson for the human rights organization. "One detainee has already died, and if the government does not act urgently it is likely that more of them will die."

The detainees were arrested in November 2000 for allegedly supporting General Ansumane Mané, the former leader of the disbanded Military Junta, who challenged the President over military promotions. General Ansumane Mané was subsequently shot and killed by soldiers loyal to the government.

One of the detainees, Colonel Baba Djassi, died on 4 February 2000, apparently of typhoid fever. He had been taken to hospital the previous day. It appears that he had been seriously ill for some days, during which time the authorities refused to transfer him to hospital.

The detainees are being held in several prisons in the capital, Bissau, in severely overcrowded conditions, where there is no running water, no adequate sanitation and a poor diet. Some food is being provided, primarily by their families. The detainees do not receive any medical care, and many are suffering from hypertension, various infections and other illnesses.

The ASecond Squadron@ police station, the main police station in Bissau, houses 73 of the detainees, at least 25 of whom are reported to be seriously ill. Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the state of health of General Bouta Nan Batcha, Nhande Seidi, Braima Djassi and Laminé Turé.

Other detainees in need of urgent medical treatment include Braima Sanhá, held at the Amura Fortress. General Augusto da Costa de Sa, General

Armando Soares da Gama and Mário Gomes, are suffering from hypertension, while Colonel Ansumba Mané, held at the Bissalanca air base, has renal problems.

Mamadú Seidi, Aliu Bangura, Augusto Fernandes and Domingos Djalo, all of whom are also said to be ill, are being held at the navy headquarters.

None of the detainees have been formally charged or tried.

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to provide adequate medical care to all the prisoners as a matter of urgency, in particular to the 55 whose health is known to have already seriously deteriorated. "The government is under an obligation to ensure humane conditions for all prisoners and to safeguard their well-being. The very basics - food, water and sanitation, as well as medical care, must be provided, or more lives will be lost." Amnesty International said.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>