

News Service: 123/99

AI INDEX: AFR 30/08/99

**EMBARGOED FOR 0001 GMT 5 JULY 1999**

## ***Guinea-Bissau: rebuilding human rights in the aftermath of war***

*“What is the future for human rights protection in Guinea-Bissau now that the war is over?” Amnesty International asks in a report published today that examines the recent war and international peace-making efforts in the country.*

*Disrespect for human rights was among the causes of the conflict. Human rights principles were overturned during the conflict. Yet human rights were apparently not on the agenda during international efforts to end the conflict.*

*Amnesty International believes that the new government has a good opportunity to introduce a new culture of respect for human rights. The authorities in Guinea-Bissau told Amnesty International that they meant to increase protection for human rights. They have already initiated inquiries into some reports of human rights violations.*

*“Those suspected of human rights violations must be brought to justice – this is the first step in developing a culture in which human rights are protected,” said Amnesty International.*

*“The Government of National Unity and particularly the government to be elected in November 1999 must give their urgent attention to ensuring accountability. They must also reform the institutions which have a vital role to play in protecting human rights – the judiciary, the police and the prisons,” the organization added.*

*During the fighting, and in periods of cease-fire, forces loyal to the government, including their Senegalese and Republic of Guinea allies, committed human rights violations. These included torture, extrajudicial executions and*

rape. The self-styled *Junta Militar* (Military Junta) also arrested and ill-treated civilians. Amnesty International delegates who visited Guinea-Bissau in March 1999 interviewed victims on both sides.

The report, *Guinea-Bissau: Human rights in war and peace*, also considers the role of the intergovernmental organizations involved in efforts to restore peace, particularly by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the *Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa* (CPLP), Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries. It also considers the actions of the UN and the Organization of African Unity.

“The story of the war in Guinea-Bissau should be studied as it has contributions to make for the debate on human rights in conflict, post-conflict reconstruction and development as well as lessons for the current trend toward regional rather than United Nations (UN) peacekeeping,” the human rights organization said.

To these organizations, Amnesty international recommends that human rights concerns should be more systematically integrated in conflict prevention and resolution efforts. In particular, the UN and other relevant organizations should ensure their presence in the area of conflict includes a capacity to monitor and report on human rights abuses. This is essential in order to establish accountability under international law.

The UN has established a Post-Conflict Peace-Building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) to help build democracy and the rule of law. Amnesty International has welcomed the inclusion of two human rights officers whose tasks include monitoring human rights and providing technical assistance for measures to protect human rights.

“Building a culture of respect for human rights will assist Guinea-Bissau to realize its full potential. For this, the country needs the assistance of both inter-governmental organizations and donor governments,” said Amnesty International.

## **Background**

The immediate cause of the conflict was the dismissal, on 6 June 1998, of Brigadier Ansumane Mané, accused of negligence in preventing the thefts of arms which were subsequently smuggled to armed separatists in Casamance province of Senegal. The next day, soldiers led by Brigadier Mané started a revolt and by 9 June troops from Senegal and the Republic of Guinea had arrived in the country in support of President Joao Bernardo Vieira.

Despite a truce signed on 26 July 1998, which was reaffirmed in August, fighting broke out again in October and the *Junta Militar* took control of the whole country except for part of the capital, Bissau. A peace accord was signed in November 1998. However, short bursts of fighting recurred in January and May 1999, when President João Bernardo Vieira was overthrown.

The Government of National Unity, which had been sworn in on 20 February 1999, remained in power and the *Junta Militar* reiterated its intention to return to barracks. Parliamentary and presidential elections are due in November 1999.

"The report will have achieved its objectives if it contributes first to discussions in Guinea-Bissau on how to address the human rights abuses of the past and develop effective systems of human rights protection, and secondly, to greater attention being paid to human rights by intergovernmental and other agencies involved in the prevention and resolution and in post-conflict peace-building", Amnesty International concluded.

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Footage shot during the Amnesty International mission in Guinea-Bissau in March 1999 is available on: +44 171 413 5977. To arrange an interview, please call the press office on: +44 171 413 5831. Amnesty International's report's "Guinea-Bissau: War, peace and human rights" is available in English and Portuguese.

