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Guinea: Excessive use of force and torture following demonstrations against the high cost of living

At least five people were killed, around 20 injured and numerous people tortured in detention after the security forces clamped down on demonstrations in Guinea. Since September 2008, demonstrations have been organized in several of Guinea's towns in protest at the rising cost of living and shortages of basic foodstuffs.

In some cases, the police justified the use of force by pointing out that the demonstrators had erected barricades, burned tyres and wrecked personal property. However, in at least one case, the security forces carried out the extrajudicial execution of one of the suspected organizers of the demonstrations. On 31 October 2008, 31-year-old Karamba Dramé, president of the youth of Khoréra was shot dead at Khoréra, near Boké, 300 km north of Conakry, by soldiers wearing red berets, who had come especially from Conakry, after they had identified him by his mobile phone. A witness told Amnesty International: *"One of the soldiers rang Karamba Dramé's phone. When it rang, one of the soldiers shot him. He died from his wounds before he reached hospital."*

After this demonstration on 31 October 2008, organized to demand the supply of drinking water and electricity to the region, at least ten people were arrested and taken to the military camp at Boké, where they were tortured. One of the victims told Amnesty International: *"The soldiers locked us in a cell that already held about ten other people. Our clothes had been taken away and we were in nothing but our underwear. The cell was very small and it wasn't easy to find a place to lie down amidst the excrement and urine. Once a day, the soldiers would lash our bodies with rubber straps. They asked us to count as they lashed us, and if we made a mistake in our counting, they would go back to zero. We regularly received fifty lashes a day throughout our entire detention"*. One of them, Aboubakar Fofana, a Koranic student, fell into a coma as a result of these lashings and was admitted to hospital in Boké. All of the demonstrators were released without charge several days after the parents of each detainee had paid 500,000 Guinean francs (approximately 80 euros).

At other demonstrations, organized on 3 and 4 November 2008 in the district of Bambeto in Conakry, the police fired live bullets at demonstrators protesting at excessive gasoline and transport costs. At least three people were killed, including a high school student, Tierno Boubacar Ba, who was shot through the heart as he took part in one of the demonstrations. Not only did the police attempt to disperse the demonstrators, but in some cases they also pursued some of them into private homes.

This excessive and deliberate use of force is the standard response of the Guinean authorities whenever their power is challenged on the streets. Amnesty International considers that the Guinean security forces have violated the human rights of the victims and acted in a manner contradictory to international standards governing the action of these forces and, in particular, the

Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. Principle 9 of this text, which has been adopted by the United Nations, states “*Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury*” and that “*intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life*”.

Amnesty International calls on President Conté immediately and publicly to order his security forces to cease all excessive use of force against demonstrators who do not constitute a threat to the lives of others. The organization also calls for an independent enquiry to be set up to shed light on these events and bring the perpetrators of these acts to justice.

General Information

In recent years, the Guinean security forces have regularly used excessive force whenever popular demonstrations have called for political reform or improvements in economic life. For instance in 2007, more than 130 people were killed and more than 1,500 injured when often peaceful demonstrations being held in the country were violently repressed. Although a committee of enquiry has been set up, it has not yet started its work and not one perpetrator has been punished or brought to justice.

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