

PUBLIC

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To: Health professionals
From: Medical office / West Africa team
Date: 28 February 2001

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Deteriorating health of at least 55 detainees
Guinea-Bissau**

Key words lack of medical care / prison conditions

Summary

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the deteriorating health of at least 55 detainees who are held in several police stations and prisons in the capital Bissau. These detainees are part of a group of 124 detainees who have been held since November 2000 under very harsh conditions. One detainee died on 4 February 2001, apparently of typhoid fever. Amnesty International is urging the authorities to provide adequate medical care to the detainees as a matter of urgency.

Recommended actions

Please write letters in Portuguese or your own language:

- expressing grave concern about the deteriorating health of 55 detainees who are being held in harsh conditions in several detention centres in Bissau including General Bouta Nan Batcha, Nhande Seidi, Braima Djassi, Laminé Turé, Braima Sanha, General Augusto da Costa de Sa, General Armondo Soares da Gama, Mário Gomes Colonel Ansumba Mane, Mamadú Seidi, Aliu Bangura, Augusto Fernandes, Domingos Djalo and at least 40 others;
- urging the authorities to provide adequate medical care to all the 124 detainees, in particular to the 55 whose health is known to have seriously deteriorated, and to improve conditions in detention centres in line with international human rights standards such as the *UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* and the *Body of Principles for the Protection of all Persons Under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow up letter seeking a response. Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 30 April, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

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and to diplomatic representatives of Guinea-Bissau accredited to your country.

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MEDICAL CONCERN

**Deteriorating health of at least 55 detainees
Guinea-Bissau**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the deteriorating health of at least 55 detainees who have been held since November 2000 in Bissau under very harsh conditions. This group includes detainees General Bouta Nan Batcha, Nhande Seidi, Braima Djassi, Laminé Turé, Braima Sanha, General Augusto da Costa de Sa, General Armondo Soares da Gama, Mário Gomes, Colonel Ansumba Mané, Mamadú Seidi, Aliu Bangura, Augusto Fernandes and Domingos Djalo. One detainee died on 4 February 2001, apparently of typhoid fever. None of the detainees have reportedly been formally charged or tried. Amnesty International is urging the authorities to provide adequate medical care to the detainees as a matter of urgency.

The 55 detainees, including those named above, are part of a group of 124 detainees who have been held since November 2000 in several prisons in the capital. The detainees are not receiving medical care for hypertension, infections and other illnesses. They are held in severely overcrowded conditions with no running water, no adequate sanitation and a poor diet.

One detainee, Colonel Baba Djassi, died on 4 February 2001, 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 "Second Squadron" police station, the main police station in Bissau, houses 73 detainees, at least 25 of whom are reported to be seriously ill, including General Bouta Nan Batcha, Nhande Seidi, Braima Djassi and Laminé Turé.

Other detainees in need of medical treatment include Braima Sanha, held at the Amura Fortress; Mamadú Seidi, Aliu Bangura, Augusto Fernandes and Domingos Djalo, held at the navy headquarters; General Augusto da Costa de Sa, General Armando Soares da Gama and Mário Gomes, detained at the Bissalanca air base, who have hypertension; and Colonel Ansumba Mané, also held at Bissalanca air base, who has renal problems.

Background information

In early November 2000 President Kumba Ialá promoted several army officers. The former leader of the disbanded Military Junta, General Ansumane Mané, revoked the promotions and dismissed the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and his deputy. He ordered their arrest and proclaimed himself Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.

Fighting erupted briefly in Bissau on 23 November between army factions loyal to the government and General Ansumane Mané's supporters. The forces loyal to the government soon quelled the rebellion

and arrested about 200 soldiers and police officers, 124 of whom are currently in detention. General Ansumane Mané was subsequently killed by soldiers loyal to the government.

Medical ethics and human rights

Practical safeguards aimed at protecting detainees have been laid down in a number of UN principles and rules. The *Body of Principles for the Protection of all Persons Under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment* (1988) urges states to provide medical examinations and treatment to detainees:

Principle 24

A proper medical examination shall be offered to a detained or imprisoned person as promptly as possible after his admission to the place of detention or imprisonment, and thereafter medical care and treatment shall be provided whenever necessary. This care and treatment shall be provided free of charge. (..)

Principle 26

The fact that a detained or imprisoned person underwent a medical examination, the name of the physician and the results of such an examination shall be duly recorded. Access to such records shall be ensured (..).

The *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*, adopted by the UN in 1984, also provides details about medical care to be provided to detainees and furthermore includes further standards for prison conditions, including requirements regarding food, accommodation and sanitation:

Medical services

22. (1) At every institution there shall be available the services of at least one qualified medical officer (..).

(2) Sick prisoners who require specialist treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals. Where hospital facilities are provided in an institution, their equipment, furnishings and pharmaceutical supplies shall be proper for the medical care and treatment of sick prisoners, and there shall be a staff of suitable trained officers. (..)

24. The medical officer shall see and examine every prisoner as soon as possible after his admission and thereafter as necessary, with a view particularly to the discovery of physical or mental illness and the taking of all necessary measures; the segregation of prisoners suspected of infectious or contagious conditions; the noting of physical or mental defects which might hamper rehabilitation, and the determination of the physical capacity of every prisoner for work.

25. (1) The medical officer shall have the care of the physical and mental health of the prisoners and should daily see all sick prisoners, all who complain of illness, and any prisoner to whom his attention is specially directed.

(2) The medical officer shall report to the director whenever he considers that a prisoner's physical or mental health has been or will be injuriously affected by continued imprisonment or by any condition of imprisonment.

26. (1) The medical officer shall regularly inspect and advise the director upon:

- (a) The quantity, quality, preparation and service of food;
- (b) The hygiene and cleanliness of the institution and the prisoners;
- (c) The sanitation, heating, lighting and ventilation of the institution;
- (d) The suitability and cleanliness of the prisoners' clothing and bedding;

(..)

(2) The director shall take into consideration the reports and advice that the medical officer submits according to rules 25 (2) and 26 and, in case he concurs with the recommendations made, shall take immediate steps to give effect to those recommendations; if they are not within his competence or if he does not concur with them, he shall immediately submit his own report and the advice of the medical officer to higher authority.