

PUBLIC

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To: Health professionals

From: Medical office / West Africa team

Date: 24 May 2001

***Further information on
MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION***

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

[original action AFR 30/005/2001, 28 February]

Key words lack of medical care / prison conditions

Summary

In February 2001 Amnesty International called for adequate medical care for a group of at least 55 detainees held in harsh conditions in various detention facilities in the capital Bissau.

Amnesty International welcomes the transfer of a number of sick detainees, including Braima Sanha, to hospital. The organization also welcomes attempts by the authorities to improve prison conditions, including the construction of sanitary facilities at the Second Squadron police station.

Amnesty International is reiterating its call for other sick prisoners also to be provided with adequate medical care, including Mamadú Seidi, Aliu Bangura, Augusto Fernandes and Domingos Djalo held at navy headquarters, and for prison conditions at Bissalanca air base, Amura Fortress, Second Squadron police station and navy headquarters to be further improved to being in line with international standards.

Recommended actions

Please write letters in Portuguese or your own language:

welcoming the transfer of Braima Sanha from Amura Fortress to Bissalanca air base hospital and the transferral of Sofo Sissé, Serifo Mané, Braima Cámara, António Samba, Mané Sanha, Babo Mané, Sadjo Sissé, Sérgio da Silva, Agostinho Indequê and João Cerca Cámara [whose names were not mentioned in the original action] to hospital;
welcoming the construction of toilets at Second Squadron police station;
asking for details about the current state of health of Mamadú Seidi, Aliu Bangura, Augusto Fernandes and Domingos Djalo, held at navy headquarters, and urging that they be provided with adequate medical care;
urging the authorities to further improve standards in prison conditions at Bissalanca air base, Amura Fortress, Second Squadron police station and navy headquarters with the provision of sufficient food, to improve hygiene, accommodation and to reduce overcrowding in accordance with the *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*.

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 31 July, 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

**Further information on deteriorating health of at least 55 detainees
Guinea-Bissau**

In February 2001 Amnesty International called for adequate medical care for a group of at least 55 detainees held in harsh conditions in various police stations and prisons in the capital Bissau.

Amnesty International welcomes the transfer of a number of sick detainees, including Braima Sanha, to hospital. The organization also welcomes attempts by the authorities to improve prison conditions, including the construction of sanitary facilities at the Second Squadron police station.

Amnesty International is reiterating its call for other sick prisoners also to be provided with adequate medical care, including Mamadú Seidi, Aliu Bangura, Augusto Fernandes and Domingos Djalo held at navy headquarters, and for prison conditions at Bissalanca air base, Amura Fortress, Second Squadron police station and navy headquarters to be further improved to being in line with international standards.

Current state of health of prisoners

General Augusto da Costa de Sa, General Armando Soares da Gama and Mário Gomes held at the Bissalanca air base were in a relatively good condition at the time of Amnesty International's visit in March 2001.

Braima Sanha, held at Amura Fortress, was transferred to Bissalanca air base hospital.

Mamadú Seidi, Aliu Bangura, Augusto Fernandes and Domingos Djalo are still held at the navy headquarters and have not been transferred to hospital. At the time of Amnesty International's visit they seemed very ill and weak.

General Bouta Nan Batcha, Nhande Seidi, Braima Djassi and Laminé Turé, held at the Second Squadron police station are receiving medication and are in relatively good condition. Eleven prisoners held at this police station were transferred to hospital.

Prison conditions

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visits detainees at Bissalanca air base, Amura Fortress, Second Squadron police station and navy headquarters once a month and provides them with soap, tooth paste and disinfectant. The ICRC has also provided sleeping mats as there are no mattresses. Some detainees have their own piece of foam. The 12 prisoners held at Bissalanca air base were provided with a foam mat by the authorities the day before an Amnesty International delegation visited in March 2001.

Second Squadron police station had no toilets until recently, resulting in faeces polluting the detention area during heavy rains. However, after the Minister of Justice visited the Second Squadron police station he ordered the construction of toilets. The local Human Rights League visited the police station and reported that the detainees saw this as a definite improvement. Amura Fortress and navy headquarters still do not have any toilet facilities.

There still is severe overcrowding in Amura Fortress, Second Squadron police station and navy headquarters. Food is provided by families and is shared between detainees. UNICEF is regularly providing tanks of water to all prisons for drinking and for prisoners to bathe at least twice a week.

Doctors from the local Human Rights League and Catholic missions also visit the detainees. A doctor working for the UNDP visits detainees every week on a voluntary basis. The ICRC, the UN Post-Conflict Mission to Guinea-Bissau and WHO sometimes provide medication.

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 2000 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.

The *BBC* reported on 8 May 2001 that authorities had begun releasing some of the soldiers and police arrested in November 2000 (Guinea-Bissau detainees released after six months):
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_1317000/1317966.stm
Amnesty International has not yet received the names of those who were released.