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Guinea: The killing must stop now

Since 10 January 2007 more than 30 people have been killed by the security forces while taking part in demonstrations, with Monday 22 January being the bloodiest day by far according to many sources. This statement was issued today by Amnesty International, which is appealing to the Guinean authorities to put an immediate stop to the killings.

Amnesty International is concerned at the excessive use of force by the military and the police who, since the January 2007 demonstrations began, have repeatedly fired live bullets at unarmed demonstrators demanding the departure of Lansana Conté, the Head of State who has been running the country since 1984.

On 22 January 2007, at Kankan, the security forces killed at least two people and injured several others. A witness told Amnesty International: *"the demonstrators were heading for the préfecture. As they arrived in the Place de l'Indépendance, the military fired into the air to frighten them, but one of the soldiers shot an eleven-year-old boy, Mamady Camara. He was hit in the chest and stomach and was fatally wounded"*. Amnesty International has also learned that another soldier shot into the crowd from the governor's offices, killing Yaya Sidibé, a tailor.

Several witnesses have told Amnesty International that the security forces, including members of the military, used their firearms against unarmed demonstrators, including minors. One of these witnesses told Amnesty International that a ten-year-old boy, Souleymane Ba, was fatally wounded during the demonstration in the district of Simbaya in the commune of Ratoma in the capital, Conakry, on 17 January 2007.

Another witness told Amnesty International: *"On Friday, 19 January, in Kissidougou [a town in the East of the country] the security forces fired rounds into the air. One soldier, having emptied his magazine into the air, took his revolver and fired at the demonstrators. Aboubacar Camara, a final year pupil at the Lycée Ernesto was fatally wounded. Oumar Diallo, another student who was also shot, had rushed to help his friend, but had received blows from a rifle butt. He lost consciousness and was admitted to hospital."*

Since 10 January 2007, Guinea has seen a wave of peaceful demonstrations. Guinea's principal trade unions, supported by the opposition parties, called for a general strike to protest, in particular, about the fall in purchasing power and interference by the Head of State in judicial matters. Demonstrations were organised in Conakry and in other towns, too, including Nzérékoré, Kissidougou, Siguiry and Kankan.

Véronique Aubert, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Africa Program, said today: *"At every one of these demonstrations, the security forces showed no hesitation to shoot at demonstrators, even though there was no apparent threat to their lives, or to the lives of others."*

Amnesty International takes the view that the Guinean security forces have violated the victims' human rights and acted in contradiction of international standards governing the actions of such forces, including the *Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials*. Principle 9 of this text, adopted by the United Nations, stipulates that "*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*".

This excessive and deliberate use of force is the standard response of the Guinean authorities whenever their authority is challenged on the street. On 13 January 2007, confronted by police violence, some demonstrators themselves set about the police, throwing stones at police patrols in Conakry, notably in the Hamdallaye district. The security forces (police officers and soldiers) responded with tear gas and forced their way into private homes to seek out and arrest suspects.

"There is a serious risk that these people who have been arrested could be tortured and ill-treated, which is standard practice for the security forces. We are appealing to the Guinean authorities to issue strict orders to the security forces to ensure that the fundamental rights of all those who have been arrested are respected" said Véronique Aubert today.

Following this wave of demonstrations, on 14 January 2007 the governor of Conakry imposed a ban on demonstrations in the capital. However, this has not discouraged the movement launched by the trade unions, who continue to organize demonstrations in the principal towns of Guinea.

The organization is also concerned about claims that, on 18 January 2007, the Head of State issued death threats against certain trade union leaders. In an interview with Radio France International (RFI), one trade union leader said that President Conté had made death threats to union members at a meeting.

"In the presence of such serious occurrences, which have been causing death and serious injury on an almost daily basis for the past two weeks, President Conté must immediately and publicly order his security forces to desist from the excessive use of force against demonstrators who pose no threat to the lives of others" said Véronique Aubert.

The organization is also calling for an independent enquiry to be set up to shed light on these events and bring the perpetrators to justice.

According to Véronique Aubert, "*Unless someone puts a stop to this impunity immediately, there is a risk that Guinea will be plunged into a situation which is out of control and which could give rise to further, serious, human rights abuses.*"