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Guinea: Still no justice for Alpha Condé one year after his arrest

Alpha Condé, a former candidate in last year's presidential elections, still remains in detention without trial one year after his arrest, Amnesty International said today.

"The motives for Alpha Condé's arrest were political and the legal proceedings continue to be severely flawed," Amnesty International said.

"Alpha Condé should be immediately and unconditionally released unless there are serious charges of his personal implication in legally identified crimes. If so, he should be allowed a fair and prompt trial."

Alpha Condé, the third placed presidential candidate in the elections of 14 December 1998, was arrested on 15 December 1998 in the village of Piné, near the border with Cote d' Ivoire. He was charged with attempting to leave the country illegally and seeking to recruit military troops to destabilise the country.

Lawyers representing Alpha Condé have been severely hampered in their ability to represent him. In February this year his French lawyer was prevented from entering the country by the Guinean authorities. In protest, Alpha Condé's entire legal counsel publicly resigned and in a letter to the Ministry of Justice and the examining judge, denounced the "serious threats to the state of law and to the exercise of their profession".

Despite recommencing work on Alpha Condé's case, his lawyers have still not been able to obtain access to the files of the case held against him.

Prior to the visit by French president Jacques Chirac, to Guinea in July, the Minister of Justice declared that the trial would begin in September. However, it has still yet to begin. In the meantime, Alpha Condé has been denied bail and remains in detention in the central prison in Conakry. Members of his family, including his wife, have not been able to visit him -- he is only allowed access to his Guinean lawyers.

"Alpha Condé's case shows just how far the Guinean authorities will go to suppress political opposition."

Background

Two members of Alpha Condé's party, together with Antoine Bogolo Soromou, former mayor of Lola and president of the National Alliance for Democracy party (AND), were also arrested in December 1998, and remain in detention without trial.

The December 1998 presidential election, in which President Lansana Conté was re-elected, was marred by violence. Opposition parties criticized the result as unfair and accused the government

of rigging the election by denying their supporters voting cards. Scores of individuals, including opposition members of parliament and local government councillors were arrested. Some of these, including Marcel Cros, leader of the Democratic Party of Guinea (PDAG), were released after two months of detention without charge.

Over sixty members of the Guinean People's Rally party (RPG) -- of which Alpha Condé is president -- were arrested and sentenced to prison terms ranging from four months to five years. Most stated that they had been tortured in detention.

Amnesty International has previously received information about allegations of torture in Guinea. In 1998, El Hadj Biro Diallo, president of the National Assembly, had condemned the use of torture and ill-treatment to extract confessions and exhorted President Lansanna Conté to take action to prevent such abuses.

Following Jacques Chirac's visit to Conakry in July, at least 12 members of the opposition were arrested and released within two and five days.

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