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Guinea: Contempt for the right to life

"Each time political opponents or citizens have dared to show their dissatisfaction with the government, the security forces have not hesitated to fire on crowds of demonstrators, disregarding the genuine risk of loss of human life," Amnesty International said in *Guinea: Maintaining order with contempt for the right to life*, a report published today.

The right to life is guaranteed by the Guinean Constitution and international treaties to which Guinea is party. However, the security forces have used excessive armed force in circumstances where neither their lives, nor the lives of anyone else, were in immediate danger. The recurrent nature of this excessive use of force and the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of these extrajudicial executions demonstrates how the highest authorities of the state cover these acts, even encourage them, in order to stifle the political opposition in Guinea.

In December 2001, the security forces fired live bullets on students who were demanding better conditions of study in several towns throughout the country. Three people were killed, including Thierno Diallo, a student, and Mody Ousmane Diallo Pettal, a well-digger.

This police brutality is only one in a series of instances documented by Amnesty International where the Guinean security forces have used excessive force against civilians. More than twenty people, including women and children, have been killed in this way since the presidential election of December 1998.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that, following instructions by the authorities, some doctors have refused to provide death certificates or to treat injuries. One of those interviewed by Amnesty International in April 2000 said that a doctor had told him: "I can do nothing, I can't give you a medical certificate for the death of your son because I would be pursued by the military. We have had instructions from the security forces."

"The Guinean authorities must accord the utmost importance to respect for the law and the protection of human life," Amnesty International urged. "It should take immediate steps to ensure that the security forces apply international standards governing the conduct of law enforcement officials and the use of force and firearms. This culture of impunity must be stopped. Those who do use excessive force should be held to account."

Specifically, the organization is calling on the Guinean authorities to set up an independent investigative mechanism which would be responsible for conducting investigations into all serious abuses of fundamental rights that have taken place over the last four years. This investigative mechanism should formulate and publish recommendations concerning the prosecution of any suspected perpetrators. Such recommendations should be followed up by the judicial authorities, who should take account of the witness statements gathered by the investigative mechanism in any subsequent criminal proceedings.

Amnesty International is also calling on other countries to condemn excessive use of armed force by the Guinea security forces and to ensure that the military aid and technical assistance they give the government of Guinea are not used to facilitate human rights violations.

The report is available at:<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/afr290012002>

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