

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 30/002/2009

02 April 2009

UA 92/09

Fear for safety/ Intimidation

GUINEA-BISSAU

Luís Vaz Martins (m), Lawyer and Human Rights Defender
Other members of the Human Rights League

Luís Vaz Martins, lawyer and president of the Human Rights League of Guinea-Bissau has received threats from an armed individual after publicly condemning the arrest and torture of prominent lawyer Pedro Infanda and the beating of former Prime Minister and current Court President Francisco José Fadul. As a result he and other members of the Human Rights League are concerned for their personal safety and have taken precautions such as altering their normal activities.

On the afternoon of 1 April, an armed man in civilian clothing went to the offices of the Human Rights League searching for Luís Vaz, who was not there at the time. The man reportedly asked for Luís Vaz's residential address and stated that he wanted to kill him because the Human Rights League was 'too talkative'.

This incident follows the arrest and torture of Pedro Infanda and the beating of Francisco José Fadul by military officials. Francisco José Fadul held a press conference on 30 March calling on the government to hold the military accountable for corruption and other crimes. He was reportedly beaten in the early hours of 1 April by four military officials who hit him with the butts of their firearms and told him he was "too talkative" in reference to his calls for the military to be held accountable. Francisco José Fadul received injuries all over his body – including to his head – and a stab wound on his arm.

Prominent lawyer, Pedro Infanda was arbitrarily arrested by military officials on 23 March hours after he held a press conference in his office, in which he spoke on behalf of his client, Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchute, former head of the Guinea Bissau Navy. In the press conference, Pedro Infanda expressed his client's opinion that the newly appointed Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces was not competent for the post. Pedro Infanda was taken from his office to the *Quartel Amura de Bissau* military installation, where he was severely beaten with wooden objects for four days, and tortured. He was denied access to medical treatment, his family and an attorney. His entire body is covered in bruises.

Both Pedro Infanda and Francisco José Fadul are currently in intensive care at the Simão Mendes National Hospital in Bissau.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Guinea-Bissau has a long history of coups and military rebellions. Since 2000, soldiers have killed three Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces, as well as other high ranking military officers. Those responsible for the killings were not brought to justice.

In 2007, four journalists and a human rights defender, fearing they would be arrested and possibly tortured, went into hiding after reporting on the involvement of military officials in the growing drug trafficking trade.

Rear Admiral Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchute was accused of leading an alleged coup attempt against the late President Bernardo João Vieira on 6 August 2008. He reportedly escaped house arrest and fled to The Gambia by sea.

On 1 March 2009, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Batista Tagme Na Waie, was killed in a bomb attack in his office in the Armed Forces General Command in Bissau. Hours later, in the early hours of 2 March, in an apparent revenge attack, soldiers killed President João Bernardo Vieira, whom they believed was responsible for the death of General Tagme na Waie. The Military pledged to respect the Constitution and a new Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces was appointed. In accordance with the Constitution the President of the National Assembly took over as interim President until new presidential elections are held, expected by early June at the latest.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Portuguese and English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Luís Vaz Martins and other members of the Human League following threats that he received on 1 April 2009;
- urging the authorities to ensure the safety and protection of Luís Vaz Martins and other human rights defenders in Guinea-Bissau
- calling on the authorities to investigate these threats and to bring those responsible to justice through fair trials;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that right to freedom of expression and the rights of human rights defenders are respected;
- urging the government to take effective action to ensure all public servants, including the military, act to recognize the legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders and to abstain from ill-treating and torturing individuals for their criticism of the military

APPEALS TO:

Interior Minister

Excelência Comandante Lúcio Soares

Ministério do Interior

Avenida da Unidade Africana

Bissau

República da Guiné-Bissau

Fax: + 245 20 1671

Salutation: Excelência/Your Excellency

Procurator General

Excelência Luís Manuel Cabral

Procurador Geral da República

Procuradoria Geral

Avenida Amílcar Cabral

Bissau

República da Guiné-Bissau

Fax: +245 20 39 24

Salutation: Excelência/Your Excellency

Prime Minister

Excelência Carlos Gomes Júnior

Gabinete do Primeiro Ministro

Palácio do Governo

Praça dos Heróis Nacionais

Bissau

República da Guiné-Bissau

Fax: +245 20 1671/ 201676

Salutation: Excelência/Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Chefe do Estado Maior Geral das Forças Armadas

Excelentíssimo Sr. Comandante de Fragata José Zamora Induta

Chefe do Estado Maior Geral das Forças Armadas

Quartel do Estado Maior Geral das Forças Armadas

Bissau
República da Guiné-Bissau

Salutation: Excelentíssimo Sr.

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

If you live in an EU member country, please also copy your embassy in Guinea-Bissau, asking the EU to intervene to support these human rights defenders, in accordance with the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 May 2009.