



## COLUMN

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### **Guinea sinks into repression and France looks away**

SEPTEMBER 9TH, 2024

It has been now two months since Oumar Sylla, known as Foniké Menguè, and Mamadou Billo Bah, Guinean activists and members of Tournons La Page Guinée and the Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution (FNDC), were abducted. They disappeared on July 9th while taking part in a peaceful citizens' campaign denouncing media censorship in Guinea.

Despite testimonies pointing the finger at the security forces for their abduction, the Guinean authorities deny any responsibility, stating that they do not know where they are. Mohammed Cissé, an activist captured with them before being released, recounted on social networks the forced displacement and torture he and his comrades had suffered. The situation is causing great concern, fueling anger and fear not only among their loved ones, but also among the entire community committed to the defense of human rights and democracy in Guinea.

Few months before the upcoming end of the military transition, the political climate is becoming increasingly alarming. Brought to power by a coup d'état on September 5th 2021, the military had initially raised many hopes among the population. However, three years on, disillusionment is bitter. The President of the transition, Mamadi Doumbouya, now runs a state where repression, authoritarianism and violence reign. Any form of criticism is severely repressed.

Since 2022, after dissolving the FNDC and banning demonstrations, the regime has intensified its repression: restrictions on Internet access, closure of the most listened-to independent media and violent repression of peaceful protests. Today, many political opponents and members of civil society are in exile or in prison. Against this repressive backdrop, lawyers, journalists, rights activists and trade unionists continue to resist, often risking their lives.



As of April 22, 2024, Amnesty International has counted at least 47 people killed during demonstrations under the Comité National du Rassemblement pour le Développement. These abuses are known, documented and denounced by civil societies in Guinea, Europe and the United States. In this context, France must communicate transparently on all aspects of its current cooperation with Guinea, and suspend any support likely to contribute to the repression of the population, in particular its security cooperation.

In view of this situation, more and more voices are being raised within the international community to condemn these authoritarian excesses. From the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to, more recently, the American and British diplomatic corps, many actors are calling for measures to be taken. Yet, France remains silent. This silence raises questions in France, but also in Guinea. It raises questions about France's closeness, or even complacency, with an authoritarian government in Africa. After the diplomatic rupture with several states in the Sahel, it raises questions about France's policy on the continent, which seems to be having a terrible time learning from its mistakes and rebuilding itself.

The building of a new partnership with Africa, announced by President Macron, must make respect for fundamental freedoms a priority in political dialogue with states. The defense of human rights can no longer be a matter of variable geometry and double standards, depending on France's strategic or economic interests. This runs the risk of France losing credibility on the international stage when its humanist discourse is based on the defense of human rights. In Guinea, defenders of human rights and democracy need strong public support. France should support Guinean civil society actors so that they can fully enjoy the freedoms of peaceful assembly, expression and association, whatever their opinion.

As a collective of associations defending democracy, rights and freedoms, and trade union organizations, we call on France to publicly condemn human rights violations in Guinea, and call for the immediate release of Foniké Menguè and Mamadou Billo Bah. Within the European Union, it must advocate a firm commitment to opening up civic space, respecting fundamental freedoms and protecting human rights defenders in Guinea.

It is crucial that the future government quickly takes a stand and expresses itself clearly. Its silence could be interpreted as tacit approval of the authoritarian excesses observed in Conakry, which would put France in a delicate situation.

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### **Signatories :**

1. ACAT-France (Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture - France)
2. CADTM France (Comité pour l'Abolition des Dettes illégitimes)
3. CADTM international
4. CCFD-Terre Solidaire
5. CFDT (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail)
6. CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail)
7. CRID
8. FIDH (Fédération Internationale pour les Droits Humains), dans le cadre de l'Observatoire pour la Protection des Défenseurs des Droits Humains
9. Justice et Paix
10. LDH (Ligue des droits de l'homme)
11. OMCT (Organisation mondiale contre la torture), dans le cadre de l'Observatoire pour la Protection des Défenseurs des Droits Humains
12. Survie
13. Tournons La Page

