PRESS RELEASE

Where are Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah? The Guinean authorities try to clear their responsibility

JULY 19, 2024

For eleven days now, the fate of Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah has remained unknown, plunging their relatives, civil society and human rights defenders into deep concern about their physical integrity. Their abduction by a group of soldiers identified by family members and witnesses as heavily-armed elements of the Special Forces and the GIGN sparked a wave of indignation and condemnation, both nationally and internationally. Under mounting pressure, the Guinean authorities finally reacted in a statement issued on July 17, 2024, by the Public Prosecutor's Office, in which they attempted to clear themselves of any responsibility for the disappearance of the two activists. This statement only accentuates the climate of insecurity and impunity that reigns in the country.

On Tuesday July 9, at around 10 pm, **Oumar Sylla** known as "**Foniké Menguè**", National Coordinator of the National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (FNDC), **Mamadou Billo Bah**, Coordinator of Tournons La Page Guinea and in charge of FNDC branches and mobilization, and **Mohamed Cissé**, a member of the FNDC, were abducted by a group of hooded, armed soldiers, some in civilian clothes, without a judicial warrant. The following day, **Mohammed Cissé** was released with signs of torture. The other two

activists were transported to the island of Kassa around midnight, to a Special Forces concentration camp. No explanation was given by the Guinean authorities as to the reasons for their detention, their whereabouts or their state of health. Today, it is impossible to know whether they are still in the Kassa military camp, which we must point out is not an official prison. The Collective of lawyers defending **Oumar Sylla** and **Mamadou Billo Bah** has in fact toured all Conakry's prisons without finding any trace of them. In a statement published on July 17, the collective also indicated that it had sent a letter to the Public Prosecutor on July 11, 2024, to which no response had been received.

Since the kidnapping, Guinean and international civil society has continued to demand their immediate and unconditional release. The news has spread around the world, relayed by major international media, African and European personalities, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, **Mary Lawlor**, and numerous human rights organizations. In Guinea, the Bar Association has decided to boycott all court hearings nationwide between July 16 and 31 in protest against the kidnapping. Calls for demonstrations are also beginning to multiply.

These kidnappings constitute serious violations of international law, notably the right to a fair trial and the right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Such actions are thus contrary to Guinea's international commitments, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, ratified in 1978 and 1982 respectively.

Faced with mounting pressure, the Guinean authorities have broken their silence in an statement issued on July 17, 2024 by the Public Prosecutor's Office. In it, the Public Prosecutor, **Fallou Doumbouya**, states that “no investigating body has carried out any interpellation or arrest of anyone”. He also accuses all those who have raised their voices to denounce this injustice of manipulating public opinion and “seriously damaging the image of our country”. This statement, far from calming the situation, only accentuates the climate of insecurity and impunity that reigns in the country. Public opinion is not fooled: by feigning ignorance about the disappearance of **Oumar Sylla** and **Mamadou Billo Bah**, the Guinean authorities are clearly seeking to absolve themselves of any responsibility.

This is not the first time that the transitional authorities have carried out arbitrary arrests. Many human rights defenders in Guinea are regular victims. **Mamadou Billo Bah** and **Oumar Sylla** have already been detained for 4 and 10 months respectively since the coup d'état in September 2021, and were finally released and acquitted in May 2023. The resumption of arrests is

worrying and comes at a time when civil society organizations are mobilizing to restore unjustly withdrawn media frequencies and to denounce the excesses of the military transition. The abduction of **Mamadou Billo Bah** and **Oumar Sylla** is intended solely to intimidate civil society and silence any dissident voices.

The signatories call on,

The Guinean authorities to:

- Disclose publicly and transparently the whereabouts, state of health and conditions of detention of **Oumar Sylla** and **Mamadou Billo Bah,**
- Release **Oumar Sylla** and **Mamadou Billo Bah** immediately and unconditionally, and that measures be taken to guarantee their safety and access to legal and medical assistance,
- Cease attacks on human rights defenders and guarantee the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in the country, in accordance with the fundamental texts and international commitments undertaken by Guinea.

To the international community to:

- Continue to put pressure on the Guinean authorities to guarantee the safety and release of **Oumar Sylla** and **Mamadou Billo Bah,**
- Set up an independent international investigation to identify those responsible for the kidnapping and bring them to justice.

Signatories :

- ACAT-France
- Attac France
- Internet Without Borders
- Justice et Paix France
- Synergie Togo
- Tournons La Page (TLP)