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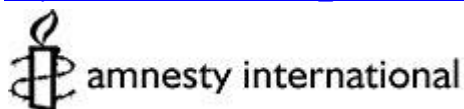
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Amnesty International Report 2014/15 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso

Head of state: Michel Kafando (replaced Blaise Compaoré in November)

Head of government: Yacouba Isaac Zida (replaced Luc Adolphe Tiao in November)

Concerns remained over the use of torture and other ill-treatment and excessive force by police and other security personnel. High levels of maternal mortality persisted.

Background

President Compaoré resigned at the end of October following widespread protests against a bill proposing constitutional amendments that would allow him to run for re-election in 2015. Following the bill's withdrawal, a transitional government led by interim President Michel Kafando was sworn in in November to steer the country towards legislative and presidential elections.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In October, following a riot at MACO prison in Ouagadougou, at least 11 prisoners were repeatedly beaten and otherwise ill-treated by prison guards and accused of organizing an escape attempt. Two prisoners died following the riot, reportedly as a result of dehydration and lack of ventilation in their cell during a lockdown.

More than 30 prisoners alleged that they had been tortured and otherwise ill-treated at the time of arrest, and while being held in gendarmerie (military police) detention centres and police stations around the country in 2013 and 2014. One detainee described being tortured for a period of 17 days at the central Ouagadougou police station; his hands were handcuffed to his ankles, an iron bar was put underneath his knees and he was suspended in a squatting position between two tables. Other detainees also said they were beaten and forced to sign statements without knowledge of their content.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

During protests in October and November, security forces used excessive, sometimes lethal, force against peaceful protesters, resulting in at least 10 deaths with hundreds more injured.

On 30 and 31 October, prison guards and gendarmes used excessive and lethal force to repress a prison riot and attempted escape at the MACO prison in Ouagadougou. Three prisoners were shot dead.

RIGHT TO HEALTH – MATERNAL MORTALITY

Concerns about high levels of maternal deaths remained. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 2,800 women died during or following childbirth in 2013. WHO also reported a persistently high unmet need for contraception information, services and goods.

The Ministry of Health, working with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and other agencies, launched the first National Family Planning Week in 2013 aimed at raising awareness about contraception and challenging persistent negative stereotypes about women and girls who take contraception.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In a ruling in March, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights held that the Burkinabé state – in its failure to diligently investigate and bring to justice those responsible for the assassination of journalist Norbert Zongo and three of his companions, found burned to death in a car in 1998 – had violated the right to freedom of expression by causing “fear and worry in media circles”.

In another ruling in December, in the case of *Konaté v. Burkina Faso*, the Court ruled that imprisonment for defamation violated the right to freedom of expression while criminal defamation laws should be used only in limited circumstances. The Court ordered Burkina Faso to change its criminal defamation laws.

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