

Guinea lawyers on strike over military crackdown



AFP

Guinea military leaders have been accused of suppressing dissent

Courts in Guinea are paralysed after lawyers embarked on a nationwide strike to protest against the military regime carrying out "arbitrary arrests" and "secret detentions", the bar association has said.

The strike is the latest sign of growing outrage over the arrest of two prominent activists campaigning for a return to democratic rule.

France's far-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, whose coalition won the most seats in parliamentary elections last week, has also called for their release.

Guinea's military toppled President Alpha Condé in 2021, following mass protests against his rule after he won a controversial third term in elections.

Many Guineans welcomed the coup, but now accuse the military of cracking down on dissent and reneging on its promise to hand back power to a democratic government.

The bar association said lawyers would boycott court sessions for the next two weeks, until 31 July.

"The courts are not closed, but their activity is rather paralysed," said its spokesman Gabriel Kamano.

Lawyers plan to return to court on 1 August - a day after a verdict is due to be given in the trial of former military ruler Dadis Camara on charges of crimes against humanity.

The case has been closely followed in Guinea, as it covers one of the worst massacres in the nation's history - the killing of more than 150 people during a protest against military rule in 2009. Scores of women were also raped.

Mr Camara, the country's leader at the time, is accused of many counts of murder, sexual violence, torture, abduction and kidnapping, along with other officials implicated in the massacre.

They all denied the allegations against them.

Authorities have insisted the trial will proceed, but it is unclear if the verdict will be read on that date because of the strike.

The strike follows the arrest on 9 July of Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Bah, the leaders of a citizens' movement that has been critical of the junta-led government.

Rights group Amnesty International has called on the government to "immediately" release them.

It said the authorities should disclose where they are being detained, and allow them access to lawyers and family visits.

Mr Mélenchon has also weighed in on the arrests in the former French colony.

“France is heavily engaged with the power in place. It must intervene so that they are immediately released and put out of danger,” he said on X (formerly Twitter).

For months now, the Guinean authorities have been cracking down on peaceful dissent, including attempts to mobilise people towards a return to democratic rule.

The junta has been criticised for suspending media outlets, restricting internet access and brutally suppressing demonstrations.