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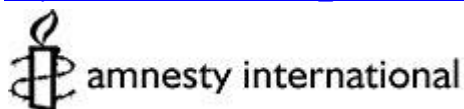
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Amnesty International Report 2015/16 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Burkina Faso

During protests following an attempted coup in September, Presidential Guard (RSP) soldiers killed 14 protesters and bystanders and injured hundreds of others. Freedoms of expression and assembly were restricted and human rights defenders, protesters and journalists faced ill-treatment and intimidation. The interim government was reinstated and investigations were opened into the September coup and crimes committed during the 2014 unrest. Levels of early and forced marriage remained high. Access to sexual and reproductive rights was limited.

Background

Transitional authorities governed the country after President Blaise Compaoré fell from power in October 2014 following protests over his attempts to change the Constitution. In April, the Transitional Parliament adopted a new electoral code that disqualified supporters of the 2014 constitutional amendment from running for office in 2015. In September, a National Commission on Reconciliation and Reform made several recommendations including the adoption of a new Constitution, the abolition of the death penalty and the disbanding of the RSP.

In September, members of the RSP attempted a coup, and took the interim President, Prime Minister and other government members hostage, triggering widespread protests. The RSP used

excessive force against protesters and bystanders before withdrawing under pressure from the national army. The RSP was later disbanded and those suspected of involvement in the attempted coup arrested. In November, the Transitional Parliament modified the Constitution limiting the Presidential mandate to two terms of five years and removing amnesty for former presidents. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was elected President in the same month, ending the one-year transition. In December, Salif ou Diallo was elected President of the National Assembly.

Excessive use of force

During the September coup, peaceful protests were repressed; the RSP used excessive force to prevent people from assembling. Fourteen unarmed people were shot dead, including six who were shot in the back while running away from security forces.¹ The RSP chased and fired shots in densely populated areas, leading to deaths and hundreds of injuries. Among the victims was 16-year-old Jean-Baptiste Yoda, who was shot dead while running with two others. A pregnant woman was also shot in the stomach while standing in her doorway in the Nonsin neighbourhood of the capital, Ouagadougou. The bullet pierced her uterus and hit the unborn baby. Both mother and child survived following medical intervention.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Prisoners alleged that they were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in police custody in Ouagadougou. One detainee alleged that he was tortured for six days at Ouagadougou's central police station; his hands were handcuffed to his ankles, a wooden bar was put underneath his knees and he was suspended in a squatting position from between two tables.

In September, the RSP physically assaulted protesters and bystanders. A witness filmed five people, including a child, being forced to lie down and beaten with belts with metal buckles. Six RSP soldiers whipped a member of the Balai Citoyen social movement as he lay on the ground. Jean Jacques Konombo, photographer for *Les Editions Sidwaya*, was kicked and beaten with a belt by more than six RSP soldiers until he lost consciousness. His camera and phone were destroyed.

Freedoms of expression and association

In September, Parliament adopted legislation leading to the repeal of the law punishing press offences with prison sentences. Later that month, there were restrictions on freedom of expression, including attacks on journalists, political figures and human rights defenders during the coup. At least 10 journalists and media stations including Radio Omega, Savane FM and Laafi were also attacked; cameras and other material were destroyed or confiscated. At the Radio Omega station, RSP soldiers fired bullets in the air, set staff motorbikes alight and threatened to burn the station down. The studio of Serge Bambara ("Smockey"), leader of Balai Citoyen, was also attacked with an anti-tank rocket and computers and materials stolen.

Impunity

Judicial authorities opened investigations into the killings of four people following excessive or lethal force by security forces, including the RSP, during the October 2014 unrest.² However, no

one had been charged or tried for these crimes under international law by the end of 2015. In September, Commissions of Inquiry were established to investigate the 2014 killings and those suspected of involvement in the September coup. Neither had yet been tasked with investigating human rights violations relating to the killings of protesters and bystanders in 2015.

Military tribunal

Military officers including generals, as well as civilians, were arrested in Ouagadougou following the September coup and charged with offences including threatening state security, crimes against humanity and murder. More than 50 people, including General Djibril Bassolé and General Gilbert Dienderé, were due to be tried by a military tribunal. Two journalists, Adama Ouédraogo and Caroline Yoda, were also charged for complicity to threaten state security.

General Dienderé also faced charges in connection with the murder of former President Thomas Sankara, including assassination and possession of a dead body, while in December an international arrest warrant was also issued against former President Blaise Compaoré for his suspected role in this murder. Authorities said that an extradition request would be sent to Côte d'Ivoire.

In the same month, three former members of the RSP were charged in connection with the murder of Norbert Zongo, a journalist who was assassinated in 1998, and more than 15 RSP members were arrested for their suspected involvement in a plan to help Generals Bassolé and Dienderé escape from prison.

Women's rights

Women's and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and goods were limited, resulting in just 17% of women reporting using contraception. Cost, distance to health centres and pharmacies, lack of information and negative male attitudes towards contraception remained the main barriers obstructing access.

Early and forced marriage was a serious concern, with over 52% of girls being married before the age of 18, around 10% before they were 15 years old. The government failed to fulfil its obligations to prevent forced and early marriages, as well as to guarantee the protection of girls and women at risk through the provision of information on, and access to, safety. Perpetrators of forced and early marriage were not held to account. Dozens of women and girls told Amnesty International that they were victims of forced and early marriage, including a 13-year-old girl who walked more than 160km over three days to escape being forced by her father to marry a 70-year-old man who already had five wives.

In October the Transitional Parliament adopted a law on the prevention and sanction of violence against women and girls and the provision of support for victims. The law also criminalized and provided for sanctions for forced and early marriage and sexual violence.

Death penalty

A bill aiming to abolish the death penalty had not been examined by Parliament at the end of the year.

1. Burkina Faso: No amnesty for soldiers who killed unarmed civilians ([News story](#), 14 October)
2. Burkina Faso: “Just what were they thinking when they shot at people?” ([AFR 60/001/2015](#))

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