

Senegal: Prohibitions, violence, arbitrary arrests: the right to protest is under threat



Repeated bans on demonstrations, together with the deaths of people during such protests, represent a real threat to the right to protest in Senegal, Amnesty International has said. Amnesty International is calling on the Senegalese authorities to guarantee the right to peaceful assembly, conduct independent and impartial investigations into the deaths of previous demonstrators, and prohibit the excessive use of force by the security and defence forces.

The last planned demonstration organized on 17 June at the initiative of the opposition coalition, Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW), was banned by order of the Dakar Prefect, citing a risk of disturbing public order. Yet nine days previously, a demonstration by this same coalition had been held peacefully.

The Senegalese authorities must guarantee the right to peaceful assembly, as enshrined in the Senegalese constitution and in international law and, in particular, repeal the Ministerial Order No.

7580 of 20 July 2011 prohibiting “political demonstrations” in central Dakar, in accordance with the ruling of the ECOWAS Court of Justice on 31 March 2022.

During the 17 June protests, violence broke out in Dakar – when demonstrators tried to accede to the Place de la Nation, which was barricaded by security forces – and in Bignona and Ziguinchor. Three people lost their lives.

We are calling on the judicial authorities to launch an investigation into the incidents of 17 June without delay, and to conduct it independently and impartially. If there is evidence of unlawful violence and killings by members of the security forces, those individuals must be brought to justice and tried,
Seydi Gassama, Executive Director of Amnesty Senegal

More deaths

Idrissa Goudiaby, 43, died in the context of the protests in Ziguinchor in the south of the country. The autopsy certificate establishing how he died has not yet been issued to his family, nor his body returned, 10 days after the event.

Amnesty International spoke to several of Idrissa Goudiaby’s brothers as well as his father about the circumstances of his death. According to his brother, Mamadou Goudiaby, “Idrissa was not at the demonstration but had gone out to return the children home. He is a taxi driver and, when there is a protest in Ziguinchor, he stops working at noon and does not work during the afternoon. The children were scattered around the neighbourhood, and he was trying to get them all back in.”

Reporting the testimonies of those who took his brother’s body to the hospital, he says: “The bullet hit him in the neck, and he fell near Nema Pharmacy in the Grand-Dakar neighbourhood. It was the people of that area who took him to the hospital because he was losing blood and the emergency services were taking a long time.”

Albert “Abdoulaye” Diatta died during the demonstration in Bignona. His family, who also state that he was fatally wounded by gunfire, are still not in possession of the body, which was taken to the regional hospital in Ziguinchor for an autopsy.

Another individual, still unidentified, died in the Bopp neighbourhood of Dakar, near the Massalikoul Jinane mosque, during the 17 June protests. While demonstrators interviewed by the media note that the individual died as a result of the police firing tear gas canisters, which are believed to have caught mattresses and started a fire, a public statement issued by the police on 18 June states that the deceased inadvertently caused the accident while preparing to burn a tyre.

Amnesty International notes that the use of force by the security forces during demonstrations must be necessary and proportional to the legitimate aim of maintaining law and order, and that the use of firearms is unlawful except in cases of imminent threat of death or serious injury to self or others.

Arbitrary arrests

A number of people were also arrested during the 17 June demonstration in Dakar, including well-known figures and leaders of the YAW coalition together with dozens of demonstrators. Such was the case of Mame Diarra Fam and Dethié Fall, both Members of Parliament, and Ahmed Aidara, Mayor of Guédiawaye [city]. This latter was tried on 27 June and given a one-month suspended prison sentence plus a fine of FCFA 50,000 for “participating in an unarmed gathering”. Dethié Fall was arrested outside his party’s headquarters on the VDN major road, in Dakar, while Mame Diarra Fam was arrested outside the house of the Mayor of Dakar, Barthélémy Dias. Dethié Fall received a six-month suspended sentence for participating in an unauthorized demonstration, while Mame Diarra Fam and 82 other defendants were acquitted of the same charges. These people were arbitrarily arrested for participating or calling for participation in these demonstrations.

On 18 June, Guy-Marius Sagna, a parliamentary candidate for Ziguinchor department, was also arbitrarily arrested for “participating in an unauthorized demonstration” while visiting 33 demonstrators being detained at the Ziguinchor gendarmerie. A decision is due to be made in their case on 28 June 2022 in Ziguinchor. These individuals should not be detained or prosecuted simply for exercising their right to peaceful assembly and Amnesty International is calling for their immediate and unconditional release and for the charges against them to be dropped.

Abusive administrative decisions, such as blanket bans on demonstrations that are not time-bound or justified by a legitimate purpose, undermine the enjoyment of freedom of peaceful assembly,

Samira Daoud, Amnesty International's Regional Director for West and Central Africa.

Further information

The protests were planned on 17 June in Dakar and elsewhere in the country, at the initiative of the opposition parties, to denounce the Constitutional Council’s decision to reject the national opposition’s list for the upcoming legislative elections.

Last year, on 3 March 2021, spontaneous demonstrations broke out in several towns around Senegal following the arrest of political opponent, Ousmane Sonko, while on his way to a court summons in connection with a rape complaint. Fourteen people were killed during the five days of protests and nearly 600 more were injured, according to the Senegalese Red Cross.

As part of its campaign “Justice for the victims of the violent repression of demonstrations in Senegal”, Amnesty is calling for the opening of independent and rapid investigations and, if necessary, the prosecution of members of the security forces accused of using excessive force.

