

The State of the World's Human Rights; Senegal 2024

Police fired at protesters during the pre-electoral period, killing four, including a child; more than 150 protesters were arrested, and journalists covering the protests were beaten. An amnesty law was passed in March, halting prosecutions for the killings of 65 protesters and bystanders between March 2021 and February 2024. The Family Code still contained provisions violating women's and girls' rights. The authorities failed to protect the rights of *talibé* children. More than 959 migrants who had departed from the Senegalese coast died at sea during the first five months of the year. The government suspended all mining along the Falémé river due to environmental degradation.

Background

The first quarter of the year was marked by tensions linked to parliament's delay of the presidential elections, amid allegations of corruption against two members of the Constitutional Court. Elections finally took place in March; Bassirou Diomaye Faye, who was elected president and Ousmane Sonko, who was appointed prime minister, were among hundreds of political prisoners released early in the year. In May, the new administration organized national consultations in a bid to implement structural reforms of judicial power.

Unlawful killings and excessive use of force

On 9 and 10 February, the security forces killed four people – including a 16-year-old boy – protesting at the delay to the presidential elections, in violent crackdowns in the cities of Saint-Louis, in the capital, Dakar, and in Ziguinchor.¹ At least 151 people were arrested in February during the protests,² and several journalists were ill-treated. Mor Amar, a journalist at the newspaper L'Enquête and secretary-general of the Senegalese Young Reporters' Convention, was beaten, and journalist Absa Hane was beaten unconscious and arrested. The authorities restricted access to mobile coverage throughout the country, and suspended Walf TV, a private TV channel, for its coverage of the protests.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

In February and March, the authorities released hundreds of detainees, several of whom had been arrested between 2022 and 2024 for participating in or calling on people to join protests. Many of these detainees, including children, were never brought to trial.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

A draft amnesty law adopted by the Council of Ministers on 28 February was adopted in March by the National Assembly. This law, justified by “a spirit of national reconciliation” and the “appeasement of the political and social climate”, covers offences linked to “protests or politically motivated incidents, that took place between 1 February 2021 and 25 February 2024, in Senegal or abroad”. The amnesty law prevents the families of at least 65 people killed, the majority by security and defence forces during protests between March 2021 and February 2024, from obtaining justice.³

Detainees' rights

There were reports by former Rebeuss prison inmates of outbreaks of tuberculosis in January, exacerbated by the dire and overcrowded conditions of detention.

Freedom of expression

In July, the politician Ahmed Suzanne Camara was arrested and charged with “offending the head of state” after he called the president and the prime minister liars. In September, Cheikhna Keita, a former police commissioner and politician, was also arrested on the orders of the prosecutor. He was accused of spreading false news, after he spoke on TV of tensions between the president and the prime minister.

Women's and girls' rights

The Family Code still contained provisions conferring “marital and paternal authority” solely on men, designating the husband as head of the family. This denied women and girls rights and authority over their household and children. Article 111 of the Family Code sets the minimum legal age of marriage for girls as 16, as opposed to 18 for boys.

In July, the report of the national consultation on the judiciary recommended raising the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18. It also called for amendments to sections relating to “paternal power”, and the prohibition of fathers seeking paternity of a child born out of wedlock, among other measures. These recommendations were yet to be implemented at the end of the year.

Children's rights

Talibé children – those studying at *daaras* (Qur'anic schools) – continued to be forced to beg for food as well as money for teachers, despite this being labelled as “human trafficking” in Senegalese law. The government failed to adopt the draft Children's Code and the draft law on the status of the *daaras*. The child protection sector was poorly funded, resulting in lack of protection for *talibé* children, who suffer a wide range of human rights violations. This situation was denounced by the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

Migrants' rights

The Senegalese coastline remained one of the most active departure points for irregular migration towards the Canary Islands. More than 959 migrants departing from the Senegalese coast died at sea between January and May, according to Spanish NGO Caminando Fronteras. Departures continued during the following months; many migrants died at sea and many were intercepted by the Senegalese navy. Most departed from fishing ports, which had become impoverished due to the crisis facing the fishing industry in Senegal.

Economic, social and cultural rights

In May, the government announced an audit of the impact of the phosphate mines in the town of Ndendory, Matam region, and called on local authorities to identify all the households affected so that they could be compensated.

Right to a healthy environment

In June, the authorities suspended all mining activities within 500m of the north bank of the Falémé river until 30 June 2027. The decision was made because of health and environmental concerns relating to the use of chemicals during mining operations which contributed to water pollution, the destruction of local flora and fauna, and a reduction in agricultural yields along the Falémé river.
