

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 212 1001

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Guinea: Arbitrary arrest of human rights defenders Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah

On the night of 9 July 2024, human rights defenders **Oumar Sylla** and **Mamadou Billo Bah** were both arrested in their respective homes in Conakry, Guinea, by a heavily armed military group wearing balaclavas, with some wearing civilian clothes. The human rights defenders were brought in and detained at the headquarters of the Police's Judicial Investigations Department.

[Mamadou Billo Bah](#) and [Oumar Sylla](#), alias Foniké Menguè, are human rights defenders and members of the "Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution" (National Front for the Defence of the Constitution-FNDC), a citizen-led movement dedicated to upholding the constitution of Guinea and all of the rights and freedoms enacted within it. The group have initiated a series of demonstrations since October 2019 in Guinea to protest against the amendment or adoption of a new constitution allowing then President Alpha Condé to run for a third presidential term. Oumar Sylla is also the deputy coordinator of Tournons La Page Guinea (Let's turn the page-TLP), an organization active in different countries in Africa, promoting citizen participation and advocating for freedom of expression and assembly in efforts to engage all levels of civil society in the democratic process. TLP mainly conducts its advocacy through demonstrations, campaigns and public debates.

Between the night of 9 July 2024 and early hours of 10 July 2024, human rights defenders Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah were both arrested in their respective homes by a heavily armed military group wearing balaclavas, with some wearing civilian clothes. The human rights defenders were brought in and detained at the headquarters of the Police's Judicial Investigations Department. Afterwards, on 11 July 2024, they were taken to a special forces detention centre on the island of Kassa and reported being subjected to suffering, ill-treatment and torture. They were not informed of the charges brought against them, nor had access to their lawyers. This arbitrary arrest comes just a few days after the announcement of a citizens' mobilisation for the restoration of withdrawn media channels, and denouncing the deterioration in the living conditions of Guineans within the context of an electricity crisis and other challenges of the Governments' transition plan.

It is not the first time that human rights defenders Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah have been [targeted](#). On 30 July 2022, the human rights defenders were both arrested and brought to the civil prison of Conakry. The arrest was in the context of a decision of the transitional military authorities to ban all demonstrations on public highways during the election campaign period. The FNDC movement denounced the ban and called for a peaceful human rights demonstration on 28 July 2022, demanding a more inclusive dialogue between civil society and the government. Following their release, the human rights defenders were prevented by the military authorities of the transitional government from leaving the territory. On 21 January 2023, human rights defenders Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah faced another arbitrary arrest by the local armed security force personnel and were detained incommunicado for two days, before their whereabouts were made known. The human rights defenders were only released on 10 May 2023, free of all charges.

Front Line Defenders condemns the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defenders Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah. The organisation is also concerned about the repetitive nature of the targeting of both human rights defenders, as it believes this to be in reprisal for their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights and freedom of assembly in Guinea.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Guinea to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defenders Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah, with a view of releasing the human rights defenders and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of human rights defenders Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Guinea are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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