

Guinea

Lawyers down tools over military repression

Marché Arends

Lawyers in Guinea began a two-week strike on Tuesday to protest against arbitrary arrests and secret detentions allegedly carried out by the military junta.

The protest comes after the arrest on 9 July of Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Bah, two leading members of the National Front for the Defense of the Constitution, a coalition of civil society groups that spearheaded pro-democracy demonstrations in 2019. It was dissolved in 2022 by the government of Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, who in 2021 overthrew president Alpha Condé.

Last week, Amnesty International accused the junta of waging a “crackdown on peaceful dissent”, which included the killing of 47 protesters in April.

The lawyers’ strike, scheduled to end on 1 August, could interrupt the trial of former military ruler Dadis Camara and 11 others, accused of torture, abduction, sexual violence and murder, including the massacre at Conakry stadium in 2009.



Indefensible: Oumar Sylla (top) and Mamadou Bah have been arrested by Guinea's junta

On 28 September 2009, Guinea’s security forces killed at least 150 Guineans by shooting into a crowd of opposition supporters. They subsequently arranged a cover-up, burying the bodies in mass graves elsewhere. Prosecutors have asked for life sentences for Camara.

The verdict is expected on 31 July, the last day of the strike. Courts are effectively immobilised until the lawyers’ return.

Last November, Camara nearly evaded accountability when gunmen broke him and three others out of prison in Conakry. He was recaptured hours later. ■