

**Urgent Action Office** 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 [urgentaction@amnesty.ca](mailto:urgentaction@amnesty.ca)  
First UA: 49/24 Index: AFR 37/8082/2024 Mali of May 31, 2024

## **MALI**

### **RELEASE MALIAN AUTHOR DETAINED FOR CRITICIZING GOVERNMENT**

On May 20, Etienne Fakaba Sissoko, a Malian economist and university professor, was convicted of defamation, damaging the state's reputation, and spreading fake news. He was sentenced to two years in jail, with one year suspended, and fined XOF 3 million (about 6,700 CAD). Sissoko, known for his criticism of the government, was arrested on March 25 after publishing a book that accused the Malian government's public information campaign of spreading propaganda. His detention violates his right to freedom of expression. Etienne Fakaba Sissoko should be released immediately and unconditionally.

#### **Write to the Minister of Justice and Human Rights urging him to:**

- Ensure the Malian authorities immediately and unconditionally release Étienne Fakaba Sissoko and quash his conviction.
- Pending his release, ensure that he has access to his lawyers and family.

#### **Write to:**

Mr. Mahamadou Kassogué  
Minister of Justice and Human rights  
Cite administrative – batiment 12  
BP 97 Bamako, Mali  
Email: [mamoudoukassogue@gmail.com](mailto:mamoudoukassogue@gmail.com)  
*Salutation: Dear Minister,*

#### **And copy:**

Her Excellency Fatima MEITE  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the Republic of Mali  
50 Goulburn Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K1N 8C8  
Tel: (613) 232-1501 Fax: (613) 232-7429  
Email: [ambassade@ambamali.ca](mailto:ambassade@ambamali.ca)

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

In recent years, Mali has seen a significant decline in civic freedoms. This includes violations of freedom of expression, press freedom, the right to information, and freedom of association. The country has been under military rule since 2021, following the overthrow of President Keita's democratically elected government in 2020 and the subsequent removal of civilian transitional authorities in May 2021.

Freedom of expression in Mali is threatened by Law N°2019-056, which punishes cybercrime. Articles 20 and 21 of this law impose severe penalties for "threats" or "insults" without clearly defining these

offenses. The sentences range from six months to ten years in prison and fines from XOF 1 million to XOF 10 million. Since 2022, opposition leaders, activists, and human rights defenders who criticize the transitional authorities have faced arbitrary arrests, detention, and prosecution.

On March 25, 2024, Étienne Fakaba Sissoko, a university professor, economist, activist, and author, was arrested at his home in Bamako by the Judicial Investigation Brigade. He was charged on March 27 with "harming the reputation of the state," "defamation," and "dissemination of false news" related to his book published in December 2023, which criticized Mali's military authorities. During his trial on May 6, Sissoko defended his work as based on factual evidence and expert analysis, but the prosecutor criticized the tone of the book. On May 20, he was sentenced to two years in prison, with one year suspended, and fined XOF 3 million (approximately 4,500 Euros).

This is not the first time Sissoko has been targeted by authorities. On January 16, 2022, he was arrested for comments on TV regarding the impact of ECOWAS sanctions in Mali. He was released in June 2022 but forbidden from leaving the country. Similarly, human rights defender Aminata Dicko was forced into exile in January 2023 after criticizing the armed forces, and her subsequent summons for questioning.

Further restrictions were imposed on April 10, 2024, when the Council of Ministers suspended the activities of political parties and associations. The next day, Mali's high authority for communication banned reporting and broadcasting activities of political parties or associations. Since February 2024, at least three organizations, including the Pupils and Students' Association of Mali, have been dissolved.

***Please take action as soon as possible until July 26, 2024! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.***