

Urgent Action Office 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca
Second UA: 49/24 Index: AFR 37/8672/2024 Mali of October 28, 2024

MALI

AUTHOR & ACTIVIST ÉTIENNE SISSOKO REMAINS UNJUSTLY DETAINED DESPITE RELEASE ORDER

On October 14, the Bamako Court of Appeal ordered Étienne Sissoko's release while he awaits his appeal trial on November 11. However, the release was blocked later that day when the Prosecutor appealed the decision. Sissoko, a Malian economist and university professor, was convicted of defamation, damaging the state's reputation, and spreading false information. The charges stem from his book, which criticized the Malian government's public information campaign as propaganda. Sissoko was sentenced to two years in prison, with one year suspended, and fined approximately 6,500 CAD (3 million XOF). Étienne Sissoko should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Write to the Minister of Justice and Human Rights urging the authorities to:

- Take all necessary steps to ensure that Étienne Sissoko is immediately and unconditionally released and his conviction and sentence quashed.

Write to:

Mr Mahamadou Kassogue
Minister of Justice and Human rights
Cite administrative – batiment 12
BP 97 Bamako, Mali
Email: mamoudoukassogue@gmail.com
Salutation: Dear Minister,

And copy:

Mr. Amadou Diallo
Minister-Counsellor & Chargé d'affaires, a.i.
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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On October 14, 2024, the Bamako Court of Appeal ordered the release of Professor Étienne Sissoko while he awaited his appeal trial, scheduled for November 11. However, the Prosecutor immediately appealed, blocking Sissoko's release and keeping him in detention. Currently, he remains in Kéniéroba Prison, located 75 km from Bamako, Mali's capital, far from his family and legal support.

In May 2024, Professor Sissoko was sentenced to two years in prison, with one year suspended, and fined approximately 6,500 CAD (3 million XOF). He was convicted of defamation, harming the state's

reputation, and spreading false information that allegedly disturbed public peace. These charges relate to his book, “Propaganda, Agitation, and Harassment – Government Communication During the Transition in Mali,” published in December 2023. His detention is solely due to his peaceful expression, violating international commitments that Mali has agreed to under the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Civic space in Mali has steadily narrowed over recent years, with mounting restrictions on free speech, association, information access, and press freedom. Since 2021, when military officers took power from President Keita, activists, opposition leaders, and human rights defenders who voice dissent have faced arbitrary detention and prosecution. Sissoko himself was previously detained in January 2022 for comments on the impact of ECOWAS sanctions in Mali. He was released in June 2022 with a travel ban. More recently, in April 2024, the government suspended political parties and associations, along with a broadcast ban on political activities—a suspension lifted only in July. Authorities have also dissolved several organizations, including the Pupils and Students’ Association of Mali (AEEM), in a continued crackdown on civil liberties.

Please take action as soon as possible until March 31, 2025! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.