

URGENT ACTION

AUTHOR ACTIVIST REMAINS ARBITRARILY DETAINED

On 14 October, the Bamako Court of Appeal ordered Étienne Sissoko's provisional release pending his appeal trial on 11 November, but the decision was suspended later the same day, following an appeal filed by the Prosecutor. Étienne Sissoko, a Malian economist and university professor, was convicted on charges of defamation, damaging the state's reputation and distributing fake news after the publication of a book in which he denounced alleged propaganda in the Malian government's public information campaign. He was sentenced to two years in prison, with one year suspended, and a fine of XOF 3 million (approximately 4,500 Euros). He must be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr Mahamadou Kassogue

Minister of Justice and Human rights

Cite administrative – batiment 12

BP 97 Bamako

Mali

Email: mamoudoukassogue@gmail.com

Dear Minister,

*I am deeply concerned with the continued arbitrary detention of **Étienne Sissoko** when he should never have spent a single day in prison.*

On 14 October, the Bamako Court of Appeal ordered the provisional release of author, activist and professor, Étienne Sissoko pending his appeal – set for 11 November 2024, but the Prosecutor appealed the decision on the same day, keeping him in detention. Étienne Sissoko therefore remains held in Kéniéroba Prison, 75 km from Bamako, Mali's capital, far away from his family and lawyers

On 20 May 2024, Professor Étienne Sissoko was sentenced to two years in prison, with one year suspended and a fine of XOF 3 million (approximately 4,500 Euros). He was convicted of "harming the reputation of the state", "defamation" and "dissemination of false news disturbing the public peace" because of his book, "Propaganda, Agitation and Harassment – government communication during the transition in Mali", published in December 2023.

Étienne Sissoko's detention stems solely from the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. Arrest or detention as punishment for the peaceful exercise of human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, is arbitrary and violates the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Mali is a state party.

In light of the above, I call on you to take all necessary steps to ensure that Étienne Sissoko is immediately and unconditionally released and his conviction and sentence quashed.

Yours sincerely.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Over the past three years, the shrinking of civic space in Mali has been characterized by violations of human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, association, information and press freedom. Mali has been governed since 2021 by military officers who took control from the democratically elected government of President Keita in 2020 following protests, and then removed the civilian transitional authorities from power in May 2021, following disagreements.

Human rights defenders, activists and opposition leaders who publicly expressed their disagreement with the decisions taken by the transitional authorities have been arbitrarily arrested, detained, and prosecuted since 2022.

This isn't the first time Professor Étienne Sissoko has been targeted by the authorities. On 16 January 2022, he was arrested by the prosecutorial office of the District Court of Commune 4 of Bamako for comments tending toward "stigmatization or regionalist, ethnic or religious discrimination with the aim of pitting citizens against each other using ICTs," after he spoke on TV about the impact of ECOWAS sanctions in Mali. He was provisionally released in June 2022 and banned from leaving the country.

On 10 April 2024, the Council of Ministers issued a decree suspending the activities of political parties and associations" until further notice. A day after, Mali's high authority for communication issued a notice announcing a ban on reporting and broadcasting activities of political parties or association. On 10 July 2024, the authorities lifted the suspension.

Since February 2024, at least three organisations have been dissolved including the Pupils and Students' Association of Mali (AEEM).

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: French

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 31 March 2025

Please check with the Amnesty International office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Étienne Sissoko (he/his)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Mr Mamounou Toure

Counsellor

Embassy of the Republic of Mali

Avenue Molière 487 1050 Brussels BELGIUM

00 322 345 74-32

Fax 00 322 344 57 00

Salutation: Your Excellency