



**REDE DOS DEFENSORES DOS DIREITOS HUMANOS DA GUINÉ-BISSAU  
(RDDH-GB)**

**Speech by the National Coordinator of Rede dos Defensores dos Direitos Humanos da Guiné-Bissau**

**His Excellency, Ms. Mona M.Bikay Director of UPR Info;**

**Dear Ambassadors and Diplomatic Representations present here.**

On behalf of the Network of Human Rights Defenders of Guinea-Bissau and on my own behalf, I want to thank you for the efforts you made so that the Civil Society delegation from Guinea-Bissau could participate in this important event (Pre-sessions of the Universal Periodic Review).

Allow me to talk about the context of the situation of human rights defenders in a country with a long history of political-military instability dating back to independence in 1973. The situation of human rights defenders is not a priority, which is why cases of violations against defenders have multiplied in recent years. These violations have to do with attacks, kidnappings, threats and restricting access to information held by the state, with total impunity for the perpetrators of these violations. They have also created an environment to silence or restrict the work of human rights defenders, while at the same time restricting people's right to access to justice, putting the work of promoting and protecting human rights at risk.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

In previous cycles, countries made good recommendations to Guinea-Bissau, regarding human rights violations by State agents, starting with the recommendation on arbitrary detentions, torture and other ill-treatment, which was not implemented, because on May 16th there was an attempt to arrest a lawyer without any judicial warrant.

Just as, on May 18, 2024, a group of 6 human rights defenders were arbitrarily detained and tortured in the cells of the Second Police Station of Bissau and three of them remained in the cells for ten days, violating the detention period provided for by law.

The recommendations on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are not being implemented on the contrary, they are going backwards, since February 2020, when President Umaro Sissoco Embaló took office, all those who dared to express their ideas against the current regime's form of governance have been severely persecuted, threatened with death, attacked in their homes and their families defamed.

With regard to freedom of assembly/peaceful demonstration, despite the fact that the law on demonstrations only requires a warning to the authorities, 17 demonstrations in recent years have been prevented or refused permission, always citing the security situation and the promoters being persecuted and humiliated.

The recommendations dealing with the investigation of cases of violations against human rights defenders and journalists are not implemented, as not a single case of violation of the rights of human rights defenders and journalists has been conclusively investigated, the perpetrators identified, tried and sentenced by a judge. Not a single perpetrator has been punished, despite the fact that human rights organizations have always demanded serious investigations into cases of violations of the rights of human rights defenders, including journalists, but have never succeeded in this fight. Also, the recommendation regarding the legal framework for the protection of whistleblowers who testify about corruption-related crimes is not being fulfilled, because there is no special law to protect whistleblowers. In the absence of such a law, any whistleblower or the channel where the report was broadcast could be the target of harassment and/or intimidation.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Challenges persist in this difficult struggle, the very practical experience of defenders, including defenders working independently, members of NGOs, trade unionists, lawyers and journalists, is a challenge. Analysis of available data and shared experience among defenders shows that the environment is not conducive to them being able to carry out their activities freely and effectively. All of this is facilitated and aggravated by the political instability that plagues the country. This has had a negative impact on the defenders' working environment, starting with harassment and gratuitous violence, an unsafe environment where there have been cases of censorship and restrictions on freedom of expression and demonstration.

### **His Excellencies and dear participants**

Finally, I would like to recommend that the Guinea-Bissau authorities guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders in Guinea-Bissau at all times.

Put an end to all acts of arbitrary detention against human rights defenders, including journalists, and that the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are guaranteed without any conditions.

Likewise, put an end to all acts of persecution against human rights defenders, investigate abuses related to the demonstrations that took place in 2023 and 2024 and convict, through criminal, civil and disciplinary proceedings, those responsible for these crimes. As well as adopting legislative measures, especially the National Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and the law for the protection of whistleblowers.

"Defending dignity by promoting human rights!"

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH !**