
GUINEA BISSAU

OBSERVATORY FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
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Political context

On March 2, 2009, President João Bernardo Vieira was shot by renegade soldiers, the day after a bomb attack killed the army's chief, General Batista Tagmé Na Waié. These killings removed two very powerful political rival figures who had escaped several assassination attempts since the November 2008 parliamentary elections. The assassinations appeared to be related to political tension stemming from old rivalries, ethnic divisions and instability in the military ranks, and the ever-increasing presence of drug trafficking interests in the country¹. On June 5, 2009, a few weeks ahead of the presidential election, political violence against high-profile personalities resurged when armed men killed presidential candidate Mr. Baciro Dabó and Mr. Helder Proença, a former Minister and Member of Parliament. As of the end of 2009, there had been no progress in the investigation into those assassinations, though in March the Government had convened a national commission of inquiry into the killings, mainly because of the lack of independence of the judicial system and the lack of collaboration of the military authorities².

Despite these tensions, the presidential election took place peacefully on June 28, 2009. After a run-off on July 26, 2009, Mr. Malam Bacai Sanhá of the ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (*Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* – PAIGC) won the election with 63 percent of the votes and was inaugurated as President on September, 8, 2009. The international community welcomed the commitment of the new President to combat impunity, foster national reconciliation and achieve socio-economic development³.

Threats against defenders denouncing the abuses of the armed forces

In 2009, the context of political tension and the presence of the military in all aspects of public life continued to make it difficult for human rights defenders to work, in particular when they criticised the influence of the military, denounced human rights violations committed by them or acts of corruption. For instance, on April 1, 2009, an unidentified individual

1/ See European Parliament Resolution P6_TA-PROV(2009)0143 on Guinea-Bissau, March 12, 2009.

2/ See Guinean League for Human Rights (LGDH).

3/ *Idem*.

dressed in civilian clothes and armed with a gun visited the Guinean League for Human Rights (*Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos* – LGDH) offices and asked for Mr. **Luis Vaz Martins**, lawyer and President of the organisation with a threatening tone. Mr. Vaz Martins was out of the office at that moment. The man reportedly asked for his residential address and stated that he wanted to kill him because the organisation was “too talkative”. No action was taken during the year against those responsible for those threats. This visit came a few hours after the issuance of a press release denouncing the serious human rights violations committed by elements of the Bissau–Guinean military the weeks before. The press release referred in particular to the attack sustained by Dr. **Francisco José Fadul**, leader of the opposition Party for Democracy, Development and Citizenship (*Partido para a Democracia Desenvolvimento e Cidadania* – PADEC) and President of the Court of Public Auditors, on April 1, 2009, when he was beaten at his home by four military officials who hit him with the butts of their firearms, after he denounced the growing influence of the military in public life and called on the Government to hold the military accountable for corruption and other crimes during a press conference on March 30, 2009. As of the end of 2009, no action had been taken against those responsible for Mr. Francisco José Fadul’s torture and abuses. LGDH had also denounced the torture suffered from March 23 to 26, 2009 by Mr. Pedro Infanda, the lawyer of the former chief of the armed forces José Américo Bubo Na Tchute, currently in exile, after he had expressed, at a press conference held on March 23, 2009, his client’s opinion that the newly appointed Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces was not competent for the post.

Urgent Intervention issued by The Observatory in 2009

Names	Violations / Follow-up	Reference	Date of Issuance
Messrs. Luis Vaz Martins, Bubacar Ture and Dr. Francisco José Fadul / Guinean League for Human Rights (LGDH)	Threats	Press Release	April 2, 2009