WEST AFRICAN BAR ASSOCIATION
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PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED ON THE PREVALENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AND THE DISREGARD FOR THE RULE OF LAW IN GUINEA-BISSAU.

The attention of the leadership of the West African Bar Association (WABA) has been drawn to the unfortunate development in Guinea-Bissau where indiscriminate abuses of the fundamental rights of the people and incessant attacks on the opposition has been the order of the day. At the center of this human rights violations is the head of government in Guinea-Bissau. It is more disheartening that the legal profession, the judiciary and indeed the Guinea Bissau Bar Association have been viciously attacked by the government of Guinea Bissau in the ploy to silence dissenting views and the rule of law.

We have received reports that the President of the Bar Association, Januário Pedro Correia is currently being threatened alongside his family members on the account of his Press Statement released on the 31st of January, 2025, where he addressed journalists and the public on the government's disobedience to the rule of law, criticized President Umaro Sissocó Embalo whose tenure expires in February 2025 for refusing to conduct elections or put in place a transition process, the lack of independence of the judiciary and political interference in the Administration of Justice System in Guinea-Bissau.

We are also reliably informed that some lawyers who are defending military officers and civilians detained following the alleged coup attempt in Guinea-Bissau, are being persecuted for carrying out their constitutional responsibilities. It is important to emphasize that the responsibility of a lawyer involved in a criminal defence is to defend his client with the best of his ability without let or hindrance. It is therefore, unfortunate that lawyers who are defending persons accused of committing crimes are being persecuted for discharging their lawful duties to their clients.

In furtherance of the calculated assault and terror unleashed on the legal profession, President Umaro Sissocó Embalo forcefully evicted the Guinea Bissau Bar Association from its Secretariat headquarters and the building was allocated to a government agency, despite subsisting court orders against the unlawful eviction.

We condemn the draconian tendencies of the government of Guinea Bissau which continue to violate the fundamental rights and dignity of individuals and professional institutions. These grave violations have led to the suffering, displacement, and loss of life of some individuals, with little or no accountability. We also read the report recently that the ECOWAS delegation who visited Guinea Bissau on a peace mission recently

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were denied audience by President Umaru Sissoco Embalo. This is clearly a dangerous trend and must be resisted.

Human rights are the cornerstone of a just and peaceful society. The systemic abuse of human rights, including arbitrary detention, torture, forced displacement, and the suppression of free expression, must be condemned in the strongest terms. We stand in solidarity with the people of Guinea Bissau and the Guinea Bissau Bar Association, and urge both national and international bodies to take immediate action to hold President Sissoco and all his accomplices accountable.

Our Demands:

1. Immediate Cessation of all Forms of Abuse: This includes the ending of unlawful detention, extrajudicial killings, and any practices that cause harm to innocent civilians and members of the legal profession.

2. Unrestricted Access to Legal Representation: Those being prosecuted by the government must be allowed to have unrestricted access to legal representation of their choice as guaranteed by the Guinea Bissau Constitution and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

3. Independent Investigations: Independent and impartial investigations must be conducted to uncover the prevailing situation of arbitrary violations of people's rights in Guinea Bissau and bring perpetrators to justice.

4. International Support and Intervention: The international community, including the ECOWAS, African Union, United Nations and relevant human rights organizations, must intervene to provide support for the victims and press for meaningful reforms that will engender judicial independence and adherence to the rule of law in Guinea Bissau.

5. All threats and acts capable of causing harm or danger to the life and wellbeing of the President of the Guinea Bissau Bar Association, his family members, other Executive members of the Guinea-Bissau Bar Association and the body of lawyers in general, must cease immediately and their freedom should be respected and guaranteed by the government.

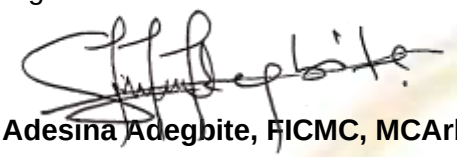
We urge the government of Guinea Bissau to uphold its obligations under international law and protect the rights of its people. We also call upon the international community to act decisively to prevent further human rights violations in Guinea Bissau.

We remind President Sissoco, especially to remember that human rights are universal, indivisible and inalienable. Mr. President, a remarkable way to show love to your people

is through the recognition and protection of their fundamental rights. We urge you to show love by governing your people with love and care.

Finally, WABA restates its commitment to the protection and promotion of the Rule of Law in the West African States. Therefore, the agitation for liberty, dignity and equality for all will continue to be the primary focus of our actions and responsibilities.

Signed:



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