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Senegal: Intimidation and arrests of protestors one week before presidential elections

One week before the first round of presidential elections in Senegal, the authorities have increased their intimidation of President's Wade political opponents. Yesterday, they arrested twenty or so members of the "Y en a marre" movement who had wished to organise a sit-in at the *Place de l'Obélisque* in Dakar.

Amnesty International asks for the immediate and unconditional release of these protestors, arrested simply for exercising their right to demonstrate, a right protected by international law and by the Senegalese Constitution. Article 10 of this Constitution stipulates: "*All individuals shall be entitled to express and to freely disseminate their opinions, whether through the spoken word, in writing, and in pictures, provided that the exercise of these rights does not threaten the honour or reputation of others, nor public order.*" To Amnesty International's knowledge, these protestors have not been charged.

The "Y en a marre" movement had planned to hold yesterday, Thursday, a continuous "vigil" protesting against President Wade's candidacy for a third presidential term in spite of the ban on demonstrations imposed by the prefect of Dakar.

The security forces blocked access to the *Place de l'Obélisque* and stood against the young protestors who, hands in the air or behind their heads, shouted that they were unarmed and simply wanted to sit in peaceful protest at the *Place de l'Obélisque*.

Seeing that the protestors had firm intentions to get to the *Place de l'Obélisque*, the security forces threw tear-gas grenades and then charged towards them. Several leaders of this movement were arrested including three rappers, Simon Kouka, Kiliseu Seck and Gueye alongside another young man, Ibama Sarr, and a radio broadcaster known as Keman.

Another protestor, Sidi Sarr, was beaten by security forces using their batons, and received injuries to the head. He was taken to the hospital and then to a police station.

After these arrests, youths set tyres alight and threw stones at the police in other neighbourhoods around the city.

Amnesty International urges the Senegalese authorities to respect the right to protest peacefully and to cease the intimidation and arrest of those who oppose President Wade's candidacy for the presidential election.

The "Y en a marre" movement was launched in January 2011 by rappers opposing President Wade's candidacy for a third presidential term. Its members consider that Abdoulaye Wade has fulfilled his two legal terms and therefore consider this candidacy, validated and confirmed at the end of January 2012 by the Constitutional Council, to be illegal.

At least three people have been killed by security forces and one police officer killed during clashes with protestors since these demonstrations against President Wade's candidacy began at the end of January 2012.