

Senegal transforms into a prison, graveyard for nearly 700



The Ousmane Sonko case



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Senegalese-opposition-leader-Ousmane-Sonko

Has Senegal transformed into an outdoor prison? Between March 2021 and June 2023, about 700 people were detained in connection with the Ousmane Sonko case.

Sonko, who came third in the 2019 presidential election and is a declared candidate in the 2024 presidential election, has been charged since March 2021 with rape and death threats against an employee of a Dakar beauty salon, where he claimed to have gone for a massage for a backache.

There is constant tension surrounding this other case. In March 2021, the arrest of the politician led to violent riots that lasted for several days and claimed at least 12 lives.

Following Ousmane Sonko's conviction for corruption of the youth on June 1, 2023, confrontations broke out that resulted in nine fatalities, as his supporters had long anticipated. This conviction could disqualify Sonko from running for president.

With the outcome of this case, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has recorded hundreds of arrests, the vast majority of victims being members of Ousmane Sonko's "PASTEF-Les Patriotes" party or having close ties with this political group.



WHERE ARE THEY BEING HELD?

These individuals are held in prisons in Dakar and in the hinterland after being detained during protests or other PASTEF actions. Reubeuss, Camp Pénal, Fort B, Cap Manuel (Dakar), Sébikhotane, Mac de Thiès, Mac de Diourbel, Mac de Mbacké, Mac de Ziguinchor, Mac de Tambacounda, Mac Mbour, Mac de Louga, and Mac de Kolda are only a few of the prisons where they are languishing. The women are being held in the prisons of Liberté 6 and Rufisque.

GROUNDS FOR THEIR ARREST

They are being charged with several counts, including criminal conspiracy, terrorism, undermining State security, acts and manoeuvres that could disturb public order and discredit institutions, involvement in an insurrectional movement, participation in undeclared or unauthorised demonstrations, offense against the head of state, and contempt of court.

PRISONERS' PROFILE

Those arrested and imprisoned include Pastef-Les Patriotes activists and supporters, influencers, whistleblowers, religious leaders, preachers, government officials, musicians-rappers, teachers, pupils, students, local officials and members of parliament.

AN ATTEMPT TO DESTROY PASTEF?

A close look at the list of PASTEF-Les Patriotes figures and leaders thrown into prison appears to reveal a hidden agenda of President Macky Sall and his regime. Today, many of the leaders of Ousmane Sonko's party are behind bars.

The latest arrest on Sunday 16 July 2023 was that of EL Malick Ndiaye, PASTEF's communications officer. He is accused of having made a call to violence and to march towards the city centre on Monday 17 July, in an audio message. Some of the people close to Ndiaye speak of a fake audio in which his voice was imitated. He denied being the author of the audio. He has been remanded in custody. His Pastef comrades denounce "*these fabrications of false elements to arrest and imprison PASTEF activists in order to decapitate PASTEF and eventually use them to justify the dissolution of PASTEF*". This is El Malick Ndiaye's second arrest. At the time of his first arrest, he was put under electronic bracelet monitoring.

Before him, Birame Souleye Diop, the second-ranking member of the PASTEF party and chairman of a parliamentary group, who is also the mayor of Thiès-Nord, was remanded in prison at the beginning of last week. He was imprisoned after being interrogated by the investigating magistrate of the First Cabinet about remarks he made at a press conference of the Yewwi Askan Wi coalition. His remarks cast doubt on the sincerity of the President of the Republic, Macky Sall, who had just announced his decision not to stand in the 2024 presidential election.

The senior judge, Maham Diallo, charged the mayor of Thiès-Nord with "acts likely to undermine public peace and offending the President of the Republic", according to his lawyer Moussa Sarr. The president of the Yewwi Askan Wi (Yaw) parliamentary group was remanded in custody by the same examining magistrate.

Bassirou Diomaye Faye, Secretary General of the Pastef-Les Patriotes party, has been detained since 14 April. He is charged in connection with a Facebook post in which he questioned the work of certain magistrates who play into the hands of the government. He has been charged with "spreading fake news, contempt of court and defamation of a public entity".

What about Waly Bodiang, member of Ousmane Sonko's cabinet, in charge of security? He too was thrown into prison, then placed under electronic bracelet monitoring and placed on probation.

Amy Dia, deputy coordinator of the Pastef party in Sahm Notaire, has been in prison for almost a year (11 months) without trial. Macky Sall's supporters accuse the matron of belonging to an association of criminals plotting to undermine state security and bring down the regime.

The long list of prisoners includes activist Ndeye Fatou Fall alias Falla Fleur. She has been detained for over a month in connection with her Facebook posts.

Abass Fall, PASTEF's National Secretary in charge of organisation, Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Mines and Energy Committee at the Parliament and 1st Deputy Mayor of Dakar, was imprisoned and placed on probation.

Bilal Diatta, mayor of the commune of Keur Massar, has been detained in Dakar's central prison for nearly 3 months for inciting an uprising.

Fadilou Keita, a member of Ousmane Sonko's political cabinet, has been jailed for 6 months by the investigating magistrate of the 1st cabinet, following a post on Facebook.

Serigne Assane Mbacké, a religious leader and member of the party, was arrested in Mbacké during a protest on 8 February 2023 and has since been held in the Diourbel central prison without trial.

MEDIA PROFESSIONALS ARE NOT LEFT OUT



Photo of Pape Ale Niang

Journalists who exercised their freedom of the press were also arrested. These include:

Investigative journalist **Pape Alé Niang** who has been twice in jail. In the first case, he was charged with "publishing military documents likely to harm national defense and publishing false information". And the second time, for "failing to comply with his probation". He is currently on a second probation order.

Serigne Saliou Guèye, journalist and editor of the daily *Yoor-Yoor*, and a commentator on *Sen TV*, was also arrested on **May 23, 2023**, for "contempt of court, illegal exercise of the journalism profession, and complicity in these acts". He has just been released, following mediation by the Coordination of Press Associations (CAP).

Pape Ndiaye, a journalist with the *Walfadjri* television station, has been charged a second time. For this second arrest, he was charged with "contempt of court, intimidation, and reprisals against a member of the judiciary, discrediting a judicial act, dissemination of false news, endangering the lives of others". This follows comments made during his weekly programme *BALANCE*.

Investigative journalist **Babacar Touré** was also arrested on May 21, 2023. He was taken into police custody for "slandorous accusation, defamation and publishing false news" in connection with his remarks on Africa 7 platform. He was released after a few days in prison. Mr Touré is currently on probation.

Oustaz Assane Seck, preacher and columnist on *Sen TV*, was also remanded in custody on 12 May 2023 by the investigating magistrate of the Second Cabinet. His comments made during a programme: "Either Ousmane Sonko is a candidate and he wins the election; or he is not a candidate and the country burns", were described as "undermining state security, calling for insurrection, acts and attempts to disrupt public order".

There have also been attempts to muzzle *Walf TV*. Its signal has been cut several times because of its coverage of the public uprisings of March 2021 and June 2023. These orders have been issued twice by the Commission Nationale de Régulation de l'Audiovisuel (CNRA), with the most recent shutdown bearing the seal of the Minister of Communication.

INFLUENCERS, ACTIVISTS, ARTISTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY MEMBERS IN PRISON

Dame Mbodj, the General Secretary of a teachers' union (Cusems/ Authentique), escaped an assassination attempt in March 2023. His vehicle was riddled with bullets as he left a programme on TFM. The ideas defended by the trade unionist are closer to that of the opposition, which is not to the liking of those in power.

Mor Talla Gueye, alias Nitdoff, is a rapper and artist being prosecuted for "spreading false news, contempt of court and death threats against the judicial authorities", following his statements on social media. He has been remanded in custody since January 2023.

Activist Abdou Karim Gueye has been arrested and imprisoned several times by the Macky regime for his statements. He has currently been in detention for several months for "calling for an unauthorised protest without weapons and insults by means of the press".

Mouhamadou Samba Djim, alias Hannibal Djim, a PASTEF activist, is being prosecuted for launching fundraising campaigns for the PASTEF party and is accused, along with Kopar Express (an online fundraising platform), of "financing activities likely to compromise public security and cause serious political unrest, plotting against the authority of the State, acts likely to cause serious political unrest and compromise public safety". Arrested on February 9, 2023, he is currently being held in Dakar Central Prison upon a warrant of committal issued by the judge of the 2nd Cabinet.

Professor Cheikh Oumar Diagne, Patron of the Rassemblement pour la Vérité (RPV), has been imprisoned several times, including on September 8, 2022. He is accused of inciting "insurrection, inciting violence against institutions and undermining state security".

Cheikh Bara Ndiaye, a traditional priest and commentator on *Walf-TV*, was arrested on June 4, 2023, accused of "calling for insurrection." He spent several weeks in prison and has just been released.

Arrests are ongoing in the PASTEF-Les Patriotes party. Macky Sall's regime is giving no sign of loosening its grip. There is a concern in the public that the opposition party led by Ousmane Sonko could be dissolved outright. Sonko is leading the polls for the presidential election in February 2024.

Although the MFWA does not claim that all those affected are innocent, it remains extremely concerned about the narrowing of civic space that is evident in the relentless attacks on PASTEF supporters, critical media and journalists, and civil society actors. We call on the government to release all those imprisoned for their views and to ensure a conclusive investigation into the killings in order to establish who is responsible and to bring justice to the families of the victims. Additionally, we urge all political actors in Senegal to exercise restraint in their communications in the media, particularly on social media, so as to reduce tensions and calm spirits prior to the 2024 elections.



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