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Hon. Minister Damantang Albert Camara,
Ministry of Security and Civilian Protection
Coléyah, Route Niger – Domino,
Matam, Conakry
Guinea

September 7, 2020

Dear Honorable Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of Human Rights Watch, to share the findings of our research into violence in Nzérékoré, Guinea's Forest Region, between March 22 and 24, 2020, including allegations of the security forces' failure to adequately prevent killings, widespread destruction of property and alleged unlawful killings, beating, arbitrary detentions and destruction of property committed by the Guinean security forces themselves.

As you know, Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights in over 100 countries across the world. Human Rights Watch has for many years documented and reported on violations of human rights law in Guinea.

Between March 24 and September 1 2020, Human Rights Watch interviewed by telephone 48 victims and witnesses of the violence in Nzérékoré, as well as 31 relatives of victims, medical staff, journalists, lawyers, academics, opposition party members, civil society representatives, religious leaders and other key informants.

Human Rights Watch has sought to address the limitations of phone interviews by corroborating findings through other sources, including reports published by Guinean human rights right groups, by collecting and examining photographs, video footage, and medical records, and by carrying out video-interviews.

Before we finalize our research, however, we are keen to integrate your government's perspectives on the events of March 22 to 24 in Nzérékoré and details of the actions your government has taken or will be taking to address them. We plan to publish a report detailing our findings on September 23, 2020.

You will find further details of preliminary findings in Appendix I and a list of questions for your ministry in Appendix II.

We would appreciate it if you could provide us with a detailed reply by September 17, 2020. We would also be grateful for the opportunity to call or virtually meet you or any of your representatives to further discuss this matter.

I look forward to your reply.

If you have any questions, or if you wish to arrange a time to discuss the content of this letter, please feel free to contact me at segunm@hrw.org or on +234 805 442 5515.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Mausi E. Segun', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mausi E. Segun (Ms.)
Executive Director, Africa
Human Rights Watch

Appendix I: Human Rights Watch findings

SECTION 1: Mob violence in Nzérékoré

Background to the violence in Nzérékoré

As you are aware, the election-related intercommunal violence which erupted in Nzérékoré between 22 and 24 March 2020 led to the loss of over 30 lives and widespread destruction of property, including homes, shops, churches, polling stations, At least 90 people, including several members of the security forces, were also injured during the violence.

Victims said the violence often ran along ethnic lines with groups consisting of armed Guerzé, an ethnic group seen as sympathetic to the opposition, facing off with groups made up of equally well-armed ethnic Konianké and Malinké, largely considered to be supporters of the ruling party. Some victims were apparently targeted based on their ethnic identity. Many of the victims were shot, hacked, beaten to death, and at least one was burned alive.

Killings

Based on research we conducted, we have compiled a list of 32 people who we believe were killed during the violence, including one pregnant woman and 3 children. We believe this list is not comprehensive, as some deaths might not have been reported. Guinean rights groups have reported that up to 36 people were killed in the violence, and Human Rights Watch spoke with 5 witnesses, including a nurse in the Nzérékoré's regional hospital and a policeman, who said that they saw between 40 and 50 dead bodies at the mortuary of Nzérékoré's regional hospital.

Disposal of bodies

Human Rights Watch also found some credible evidence to support an allegation, made by Guinean human rights groups, that the bodies of over two dozen people killed during the violence were removed from Nzérékoré's regional hospital and secretly buried in a mass grave in the 'May 1' forest in the city. Relatives of more than two dozen people killed during the violence told Human Rights Watch that the hospital refused to hand over their family members' remains and did not know where their loved ones had been buried or disposed of. Guinean human groups said that the burial in a mass grave was an attempt by the Guinean authorities to cover up the scale of the violence. Human Rights Watch analyzed satellite imagery of the alleged site of the mass grave, but the extensive tree cover in the area made it impossible to discover what happened between March 22 to March 24.

Destruction of property

Guinean rights groups reported that up to 83 properties, including homes, shops and 4 churches, were either burned or destroyed during the violence by violent mobs of both armed ethnic Guerzé and armed ethnic Konianké and Malinké. Human Rights Watch spoke to 23 people whose properties were either burned or destroyed and looted during the violence. We also received information that at least three polling stations, two in Bellevue neighborhood and one located within the University area, were attacked and damaged by violent protestors who attempted to boycott elections on March 22.

Sexual violence

Human Rights Watch spoke to a 17-years-old girl who said she was gang-raped on March 22 by a group of armed ethnic Konianké and Malinké who attacked and burned down her home in Bellevue neighborhood in Nzérékoré. Human Rights Watch also spoke to the victim's mother and tutor.

SECTION 2: Alleged human rights violations by Guinean security forces

Security forces' response to the violence

Our findings suggest that the inter-communal violence in Nzérékoré was exacerbated both by 22 March elections and by the failure of authorities and security forces to effectively quell the tensions and hold to account all those responsible from all communities.

Almost all the 48 witnesses and victims Human Rights Watch interviewed said that Guinean authorities and security forces failed to take adequate steps to effectively quell the violence in Nzérékoré, especially on March 22. They said that there were not enough security forces there on election day to prevent and stop armed citizens from attacking people and properties, as military reinforcements only arrived on March 23. They also added that, despite the reinforcements, security forces were not able to quash the violence until March 24.

More than 20 witnesses, from Guerzé, Konianké, and Malinké ethnic communities, said that even when police, gendarmes or military were present or called upon, they did not intervene to stop groups of armed men from attacking people or destroying properties. Opposition leaders, civil society groups, and witnesses from the Guerzé community also said they believed that the security forces' response was aimed at securing the vote and election material, rather than protecting lives and property.

We would welcome further details from you as to whether you consider that the Guinean government took adequate steps to secure the legislative elections and

constitutional elections in Nzérékoré and subsequently took all necessary steps to prevent violence. You can find more detailed questions below.

Unlawful killings and excessive use of force by security forces

Human Rights Watch research indicates that security forces killed at least two people, Widot Bamba and Lancine Kone; raided homes, looted and damaged properties; beat and arrested dozens of men during security operations across the city of Nzérékoré between March 22 and 24.

Two witnesses to the death of Widot Bamba, a woman who was two-months pregnant, said security forces shot her at close range on March 23 in Nzérékoré's Gbaghana neighborhood. They said that, as security forces attempted to dismantle a roadblock erected by armed Guerzé a few meters away from Bamba's home, they shot around and when they saw Bamba closing the door of her home, one of them shot her in the hip.

Three witnesses to the death of Lancine Kone, a 38-year-old farmer, said that a soldier shot him as he ran from the military and attempted to hide in a food shop in Bellevue neighborhood on March 23. Kone was transported to the Nzérékoré regional hospital where he died of his injuries.

On March 23, security forces, including the military, gendarmes, and policemen, conducted a search and arrest operation in Boma, a neighborhood mainly populated by Guerzé and Peuhl communities, raided homes, destroyed and looted properties, beat and arrested dozens of men. Human Rights Watch interviewed four people arrested during the operation who said they were beaten, and their properties destroyed and looted.

Military camp detentions, ill-treatment

According to Human Rights Watch's research and reports from Guinean rights groups, security forces arrested over 100 people during and immediately after the violence in Nzérékoré. Authorities said security forces ordered the arrest of people suspected of involvement in the violence in an effort to calm the situation, but former detainees, witnesses and opposition leaders told Human Rights Watch that many people who did not participate in the violence were arrested arbitrarily from homes and neighborhoods where fighting had taken place. Most of those arrested were illegally detained at the Beyanzin military camp in Nzérékoré in degrading conditions. Some were beaten.

Human Rights Watch interviewed seven people who were arrested during the violence in Nzérékoré and held at the Beyanzin military camp between 22 and 25 March. Three of them said that on March 24 soldiers at the Beyanzin military camp forced them to carry weapons – which did not belong to them - and then paraded them before local

journalists and authorities. The former detainees also said those who refused to hold the weapons were beaten up by soldiers.

Appendix II

General questions on Human Rights Watch's preliminary findings

- Please could you tell us how many people, in your estimation, were killed and injured during the violence in Nzérékoré from March 22 to March 24?
- Please could you tell us how many members of the security forces were killed and how many were injured during the violence in Nzérékoré from March 22 to March 24?
- Your government has accused the opposition of orchestrating the election-day violence in Nzérékoré and across Guinea. Please could you elaborate on this and provide more information to substantiate these accusations?

Specific questions on alleged human rights violations documented by Human Rights Watch

Security forces' response to the violence

- Please could you describe what efforts the Guinean authorities and security forces took to try to prevent violence in Nzérékoré during the legislative elections and constitutional referendum, including how many members of the security forces were deployed and from what branches of the security forces?
- Please could you describe the steps that the Guinean authorities and security forces made to try to stop the violence once it broke out in Nzérékoré and prevent killings, injuries and destruction of property?

Unlawful killings

- Please could you describe what steps you have taken to investigate the alleged unlawful killings of Widot Bamba and Lancine Kone? Have any members of the security forces been disciplined or charged?

Excessive use of force

- Please could you describe what was the purpose of the search and arrest operation in Boma neighborhood described above?
- Please could you describe what steps you have taken to investigate allegations of misconduct by the security forces including the destruction and looting of homes in Boma neighborhood described above? Have any members of the security forces been disciplined or charged?

Mass and arbitrary arrest and detentions

- Please could you tell us how many people were arrested during and immediately after the violence in Nzérékoré? Please could you tell us how many have been released and how many remain in detention?
- Please could you explain why more than 100 people who had been arrested in Nzérékoré were held for several days at the Beyanzin military camp? Can you explain whether this practice is legal?
- How do you respond to allegations that the arrests carried out during the violence and the subsequent detentions were 'partial', mostly targeting members of one community (Guerzé)?
- How do you respond to the allegation according to which at least three of suspects held at the Beyanzin military camp in Nzérékoré were given weapons which did not belong to them by the military and photographed against their will in the presence of the Governor and the military commander?
- Please could you provide an update about the legal proceedings concerning 43 people - who had been arrested in Nzérékoré during and immediately after the violence - and who are currently detained in Kankan?

Ill treatment of detainees and illegal detention

- Please could you provide a response about allegations of beatings by the security forces of suspects at the Beyanzin military camp in Nzérékoré?

Mass grave

- How do you respond to the allegation that the bodies of over two dozen people killed during the violence were removed from Nzérékoré's regional hospital and secretly buried in a mass grave in the 'May 1' forest?