

# OMAR AZZABI

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If you need to appeal a legal case in Guinea, it can take up to eight months just to be heard by a judge. Often, people living in remote areas have no means of reaching their regional capitals to appear in court.

Since the end of military rule in 2010, Guinea has been working to remedy these challenges and to reintroduce judicial and correctional institutions that meet its international commitments, including the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment that it ratified on 10 October 1989.

As a UN Youth Volunteer with the West African Regional Office of OHCHR in Dakar, I was responsible for paying unannounced civilian visits to prisons and police in the Upper Guinea region in Kankan, Siguiri, Mandiana, Kérouané, Dabola and Dinguiraye to monitor prisoner conditions. I visited more than 12 gendarmeries, police stations and civilian prisons in Upper Guinea. Our team met with 78 suspects and detainees, questioning them on the conditions relating to their health, hygiene, medical care and nutrition. We also took the opportunity to remind the security and police forces of Guinea's obligations regarding the rights of prisoners.

As a member of the OHCHR team, I felt keenly the weight of responsibility as I went about my duties. I was aware that my position inspired trust, and came with a perception of competence and fairness – and that I needed to reflect those attributes at all times.

It was thanks to the trust of the National Prison Administration (DNAP) that we were able to insist that prisoners receive doctors' visits every 15 days, something that was being overlooked at certain locations. Similarly, on learning of a prolonged water shortage in Central Guinea that had forced officials to resort to buying water for the prisoners, we were able to appeal directly to the prison director, the mayor and the national water company to get the water supply restored. These achievements can sometimes feel like drops in the ocean compared to the volume of work that remains to be done. My attitude is that if I weren't present as a volunteer, whatever difference I have made might not have been made. I intend to remain within the UN system for as long as I can.



Omar Azzabi (right) at the gendarmerie post of Kérouané, Guinea, during a prison monitoring mission. (UNV, 2015)

***I would like to see UN Volunteers being deployed even more, being better integrated into the work of the UN family. Volunteering is the future of UN work in the field, and a way of introducing more people into public service.***

Even though Omar's duties were to monitor human rights violations before, during and after the October 2015 presidential elections, he took the initiative to monitor detention centres within the Kankan region and met with non-governmental organizations and Guinean authorities. His final achievement was the release of a suspect arbitrarily detained in Dinguiraye.

Louis-Marie Bouaka, Representative of the High Commission for Human Rights in Guinea