

Guinea in Transition

I. OVERVIEW

For too long, public figures within and outside Africa have been timid about discussing Guinea's deep-rooted problems. Its strong anti-imperialist stance in the 1960s and beyond earned it respect among pan-Africanists, but the hands-off attitude that grew out of that respect has long since degraded into indifference and cynicism. The probability is now high that President Conté's term will end in a military takeover, which some seem prepared to accept before the fact, as if it were a means of preserving Guinea's sovereignty. But parts of Guinea's civilian elite are finally beginning to treat the country's future as their own collective concern, one not to be resolved by a third party, whether the army or foreign diplomats. They should be given every encouragement, including by relevant international actors, to do so.

The melodramatic events of 4-5 April 2006 are yet to be fully explained. A major cabinet shake-up was announced initially on national radio, then stopped in mid-broadcast by soldiers during a second announcement; this led within hours to the relevant presidential decree being rescinded and the prime minister sacked. Some claim the prime minister forged part or all of the decree that was said to be signed by the president and would have strengthened the prime minister's position relative to a rival clan close to the president. Others say the clan, led by the secretary general of the presidency, Fodé Bangoura, simply convinced the president to change his position publicly. It does not matter which version is true: both point to fundamental decrepitude, verging on anarchy, at the centre of a government incapable of taking decisions except by the decree of an individual who is fickle at best and may now not be fully competent to act.

In the midst of this ugly scrum for power, civil society is beginning to formulate a vision for Guinea's future, including a peaceful civilian succession. Donors should be ashamed they have not done more to help. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has slashed its budget by two thirds, Canada has closed its embassy, and European Union (EU) money is just starting to trickle in, after being frozen for years because of Guinea's poor governance record. While Guinea's civil society moves forward, average citizens are buckling under the combined weight of hunger, lack of electricity

and water, a decrepit communications infrastructure, and absence of health and education services.

If the new spirit of self-reliance is to gain traction among the general population, civil society organisations, press and labour unions need a real influx of donor money now. Donors should immediately begin work on how the inadequacies of the December 2005 municipal elections might be repaired. They were well prepared but poorly executed, especially because of inadequate voter identity cards and a powerless electoral commission.

The proposals coming out of the National Consultation (*Concertation Nationale*) in late February/early March 2006, bringing together political parties, civil society organisations, trade unionists, women's groups and youth, must also take better account of realities on the ground. A civilian transition is the prerequisite for them to be applied. Calls for all existing institutions, from the Supreme Court to the National Assembly, to be abolished are more likely to throw the government's civilian politicians into the arms of the military than to entice them or to encourage the generals and colonels to think about a legal transition.

The way forward will have to mix the ideal with the actually existing. It should build upon the modest political reforms made in 2005 and distinguish the technical interventions necessary for more transparent elections from the longer-term dialogue required to plot out major changes in political practice, including a more independent judiciary, constitutional reform, and addressing past injustices that fester just beneath the surface of Guinean society.

The seriously ill President Conté's trip to Switzerland for medical treatment, in the midst of the National Consultation, dramatised what was already a fact: his increasing absence from the day-to-day management of government over the last two years. The opportunism and disarray surrounding that absence were publicly displayed on 4-5 April. With the general strike, however, civil society has presented itself as a possible counterweight to the "war of clans" that dominates the government. As an observer said, "the genie is out of the bottle".

To help Guineans as they start to look forward for the first time in many years:

- ❑ donors should accompany their funding with clear diplomatic signals that a government formed through military takeover (even if it had a civilian component) would be unacceptable and denied recognition or aid;
- ❑ international actors should support the dialogue begun in the National Consultation along two separate but parallel tracks: the first, immediate preparation for transparent elections, whether they be presidential, or the legislative polls slated for 2007; the second to institute a National Conference that would set social, political and governance goals, including recommendations for constitutional reform;
- ❑ the Vatican should authorise the widely respected engaged priest, Msgr Robert Sarah, to lead the National Conference in the event he is elected as its head; and
- ❑ if Conté's office becomes open suddenly, international actors should press the president of the Supreme Court to extend the 60-day interim period envisaged by the constitution at least long enough to allow electoral lists to be revised, photographic identity cards for voters to be prepared and parties to organise their campaigns; and the EU should release money from the European Development Fund to make this possible.

II. FORWARD MOVEMENT

A. DECEMBER 2005 ELECTIONS

Under pressure from donors including the EU and the U.S., Guinea instituted a number of reforms in the second half of 2005.¹ These included revising electoral lists, permitting privately-owned radio and television stations, and creating the country's first electoral commission. The revision of the electoral lists, which began on 26 April, was declared completed by the interior minister,² Kiridi Bangoura, though opposition parties remained unsatisfied. In a real advance, voters had the opportunity to check the lists to ensure their names were there. This did not necessarily eliminate deceased or "ghost" voters, however.

With the presidential decree in late August that opened the airwaves, Guinea became the last state in the region to

allow private ownership of electronic media, a significant step in a country well over half of whose population cannot read or write.

In October, the government created an Autonomous National Electoral Commission (CENA). The opposition coalition, the Republican Front for Democracy and Change³ (FRAD) denounced it as a façade, without genuine power, since it answers to the interior ministry, which organises elections. The commission has shortcomings but represents modest progress.

Later in October, a presidential decree fixed the date of the local elections for 18 December. The president appointed CENA's 22 members on 27 October. The commission includes seven from the presidential camp, seven from the opposition, five from civil society and three from the government bureaucracy. After hesitating, the FRAD decided to participate "to show the international community that (they) were committed to helping the country go forward", while remaining convinced that "there are no guarantees of fair play". Since the opposition had earlier threatened to boycott these elections as they had prior presidential and legislative polls, this was also a step forward. The EU pledged €1.9 million toward the December 2005 elections, while the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the U.S. and France contributed financial or technical assistance.

Diplomats and other foreign observers remarked that the campaign period was handled well. Although no new television or radio stations had begun broadcasting, Guinean national television gave equal access to all registered political parties, with the President's *Parti de l'Unité et du Progrès* (PUP) receiving no more time than the smallest opposition party.⁴ The polling stations were outfitted with new, transparent urns, and as noted, voters were able to check their registration on voter lists. A major deficiency, however, was that administrative hurdles deprived opposition parties of the opportunity to put forward many of their preferred candidates. Some parties had more than half the names on their lists rejected.⁵

Voting day passed in most areas without disturbances. According to one observer, the bodyguards of the prefect of Kouroussa shot into a crowd of unarmed villagers near Kouroussa, wounding three, when they threw rocks at the unpopular official's vehicle.⁶ Initial reports were of very

¹ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°94, *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, 14 June 2005, for a discussion of these reforms and the broader political context.

² The formal title in Guinea is minister for decentralisation and territorial affairs.

³ The term is *Alternance* in French, emphasising need for change in government.

⁴ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Conakry, 19 January 2005.

⁵ Crisis Group interview, EU official, Brussels, March 2006.

⁶ There had been a riot in Kouroussa in September 2005, during which security forces reportedly fired into an unarmed crowd, wounding two. The crowd was protesting alleged theft by the

low turnout (from 6 to 35 per cent in half a dozen districts of Conakry),⁷ in part perhaps because FRAD did little to prepare supporters in the technical aspects of voting, which appears to have resulted in many nullified ballots. Both opposition parties and observers made claims of ballot-stuffing and other forms of fraud. Their accusations were directed particularly at military bases, which allegedly tallied more votes than they had registered voters.

In general, the public seemed to invest little hope in the possibility that these elections might in any way improve their generally miserable situation. A diplomat noted, however, in a comment agreed with by all sources Crisis Group consulted in January 2006, that “the run up to the elections was close to exemplary, but on election day, many people reverted to old habits. Although this definitely tainted the results of the election, it still represented significant progress”. NGOs, funded in part by the EU, observed the election process nationwide and produced a credible, balanced report that cited both improvements and irregularities.⁸

The greatest deficiency, according to most Guinean and foreign observers, was the use of *attestations de résidence*, slips of papers without a photograph that were given selectively to registered voters. Multiple observers said these were denied to voters who were expected to support opposition parties but provided in large numbers to those who were part of the PUP apparatus. One observer saw a man walk into a polling booth with over 20 attestations and begin to fill out ballot after ballot. When asked what he was doing, he said he was voting on behalf of family members.⁹

The obvious remedy would be to develop and use photographic identity cards like those being made in Senegal. Such a distribution was planned (but abandoned because of time and financial constraints) for the recent elections in Benin, at an estimated cost of \$20 million for a population of 6.5 million. In Côte d’Ivoire (with a population of eighteen million) the EU has promised €2 million for a similar undertaking. The process in Guinea (eight million inhabitants), including a public

same Préfet from a community development fund created by a local gold mining company with assistance from UNDP. This observer arrived in the village on election day and interviewed villagers within hours of the event taking place.

⁷ Crisis Group telephone communication from journalist in Conakry, 20 December 2005. The government ultimately claimed 58 per cent total turnout, with 37 per cent in urban areas. See “Guinea: Ruling party wins landslide in pivotal local elections”, IRIN, 28 December 2005.

⁸ Insufficient familiarity with the electoral rules may have been responsible for many of the irregularities. Crisis Group interview, EU official, Brussels, March 2006.

⁹ Crisis Group interview, Conakry, 27 January 2006.

information campaign, a computerised central voter list, full revision of the existing list and distribution of free photographic identity cards to all registered voters, should cost approximately €15 million. The EU should fund this project, which is already under consideration.¹⁰

B. THE GENERAL STRIKE (27 FEBRUARY-3 MARCH)

On 27 February 2006, Guineans began a general strike. Led by the combined labour unions,¹¹ it was respected by everyone in Conakry.¹² According to one humanitarian worker, “we drove around all of Conakry, and it really did resemble a dead city”.¹³ The primary justification was workers’ plummeting standard of living.¹⁴ However, it is not just salaried workers who are now going hungry, but the entire population, a fact demonstrated by the across-the-board adherence to the strike. The strike was significant for three reasons:

- Trade unions, which were crushed and outlawed after a 1961 teachers strike, were legalised again in the 1990s but had done little of significance since. This marks the renaissance of a key sector of civil society, which through strikes in the post World War II period (especially 1947-1948 and 1953) played a major role in extracting concessions from the French that led to independence.¹⁵ Though

¹⁰ Reportedly the European Development Fund (EDF) has adequate resources to support election preparations. Crisis Group interview, EU official, Brussels, March 2006. If these funds cannot be tapped quickly, the EU should consider jumpstarting the project with money from the Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM), a Commission instrument used to respond promptly, among others, “to situations of crisis or emerging crisis, situations posing a threat to law and order, the security and safety of individuals, situations threatening to escalate into armed conflict or to destabilise the country”.

¹¹ *l’Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée-Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée (l’inter syndicale USTG-CNTG)*.

¹² See A. Diallo “Guinée: CNTG/USTG-Gouvernement, l’épisode d’un désaveu”, *L’Aurore*, 14 March 2006.

¹³ Crisis Group correspondence from humanitarian worker, 20 March 2006.

¹⁴ A primary school teacher or policeman makes some 120,000 Guinean francs (GF) each month, (\$24), the price of a 50 kg sack of rice. In March 2004, the same amount of rice cost 35,000GF. A litre of petrol costs 4,400GF; of diesel, 4,200GF. In July 2004, a litre of petrol cost 1,500GF. The Guinean franc, 2,600:\$1 in June 2004, is now exchanged at 4,950:\$1. During this period, salaries have not changed.

¹⁵ For more on the strikes and their significance, see F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The labour question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996); and E. Schmidt,

socialist leader Sékou Touré's repression of the unions was one of the first steps toward authoritarianism, his own career began as a trade union leader, and all Guinean schoolchildren are taught the potentially transformative power of such organised, peaceful protest. Suddenly, this approach has jumped out of the history books and back into the streets of Conakry.

- The unions found a way to unite all sectors of society, something the opposition parties had never done. FRAD was smart enough to recognise this and immediately joined with civil society organisations, women's groups, youth groups, religious figures and union members¹⁶ to hold the National Consultation of 17-20 March 2006.
- Both the unions and the security forces showed restraint. There was no violence, and the unions had the maturity to maintain the strike long enough to show their teeth but to end it before provoking the government into violence, which could have sparked a catastrophic uprising.

C. THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION

The National Consultation was the most mature and consensus-oriented discussion Guinea has seen to plan a way forward, a major breakthrough in a country where there has been little space for such discussions, and politics has been almost exclusively personality-based. It should be built upon and each step forward supported by international funding and diplomacy. There will be backsliding, and there may still be an ugly scrum for preeminence once the power vacuum in the president's office is officially acknowledged, but it is the kind of process that can produce more peaceful and considered progress.

The National Consultation, which took place on 17-20 March, built upon the discussions launched by a conference organised by the National Forum of Guinean Civil Society Organisations entitled "Civil Society and the Democratisation Process: Issues and Perspectives", that took place in the week after the strike.¹⁷ While each of these events built upon the momentum of what preceded it, they were planned separately, and the health of the president had nothing to do with their timing.

Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958 (Portsmouth, 2005).

¹⁶ The unions themselves, having promised the government to stay out of politics, were not officially represented at the national consultation but many members attended as private citizens or in other groups.

¹⁷ The final Communiqué of this meeting is attached as Appendix C below.

The National Consultation organised three separate commissions: Political, Economic, and Socio-cultural. The Political Commission recommended an eighteen-month transition, led by a neutral, consensual prime minister, a reformed (truly independent) electoral commission, and a judicial tribunal to replace the Supreme Court (subservient to the executive). The transition would be overseen by a "International Observatory" with representation from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), and the UN. The Economic Commission identified the problem of economic governance as one of the central problems Guinea needed to address if the overall situation were to improve. It called for stricter laws ensuring punishment for economic crimes and an external audit of the government's accounts and parastatal companies, as well as a living wage for civil servants and other employees.

Crisis Group supports the notion of a process that addresses problems with the constitution, the judiciary, and the electoral commission but proposes it operate on parallel tracks. Preparations in support of the next round of elections – at the latest in 2007, when voting for parliament is scheduled – should begin immediately, including drafting and promulgation of a law giving the electoral commission true independence and operational authority, rather than mere advisory capacity; manufacture of photographic voter ID cards; and revision of electoral lists. Separately, the important work the National Consultation began of charting the way forward should continue.¹⁸

III. DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Crisis Group has consistently argued that the way forward for Guinea requires a shift away from personality-based politics toward concrete, consultative attempts to build institutions.¹⁹ The National Consultation has begun this, and it needs to continue, but it is important also to know the key individual players and their likely roles in coming weeks and months.

A. MINISTERS

Cellou Dalein Diallo – The former prime minister was a member of Conté's government for more than ten years. Temperate, mild-mannered, intelligent and articulate, he had been one of its two public faces (along with Kiridi Bangoura). Diallo speaks English and has been especially involved in negotiating with the Bretton Woods

¹⁸ This process is discussed further in Section IV B below.

¹⁹ Crisis Group Report, *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, op. cit.

institutions. However, to make real progress on economic governance, he had to challenge entrenched interests of Conté and those close to him and achieved only limited success. He saw himself as a future president but it is not clear how big a constituency he could have mustered. From mid-2005, he was increasingly isolated and clashed frequently with the secretary general of the presidency, Fodé Bangoura, businessman Mamadou Sylla and others in Conté's inner circle. These tensions exploded on 4-5 April, when the allegedly forged decree removed or demoted such powerful ministers as Fodé Soumah (Youth and Sports) and Kiridi Bangoura (Interior). The decree was soon reversed, and three hours later Diallo was sacked.

Kiridi Bangoura – The interior minister (decentralisation and territorial affairs) is 42, a PhD in sociology who is ambitious but probably prepared to bide his time for four to six years before trying for the presidency. This makes him an important potential ally for reform, as he understands Guinea must change and is changing, and the Conté era dinosaurs can hold on only for so long. To be viable, he should start distancing himself from the old guard now but he is said to be a Sosso (Soussou) ethnic nationalist, and it is not entirely out of the question that power might fall into his hands by default. The military could choose him as a young, reformist front-man, one far enough inside the old system that he could be expected to allow them to retain much of their former economic and even political influence.

Fodé Bangoura – The secretary general of the *Présidence* (presidential palace) and an insider of the Sosso clique along with businessman Mamadou Sylla, he is said to see himself as a future president, though few others do. He has risen to power as Conté's gatekeeper and appears to have been strengthened more than anyone else by the events of 4-5 April. Bangoura was said to be the person who gave the order to members of the Presidential Guard who stormed the national radio station and stopped the second broadcast of the decree on a cabinet reshuffle. This was said to be justified at least in part because the decree had not passed by Bangoura's office.²⁰

B. LEGISLATURE AND JUDICIARY

Aboubacar Somparé – The president of the National Assembly was an apparatchik of Sékou Touré's *Parti Démocratique de Guinée* (PDG) party who recycled himself as a member of the inner sanctum of Conté's

PUP.²¹ Disliked by many within the army and the PUP hierarchy, he is in the constitutional line to take over if Conté dies or is incapacitated.²² Some oppose this because they believe he is bent on clinging to that power. Others object that he leads an illegitimate National Assembly.²³ His lack of a constituency, however, is positive, because try as he might, it is unlikely he could retain the presidency. If he becomes interim president, he could make a considerable contribution by functioning as a neutral guardian of power but he would probably need to have assurances about his future. He likely is looking for allies now to guarantee that future. The shape such an alliance takes could be relatively benign (with an opposition leader), or noxious (with a military strongman). President Conté is said to be extremely angry with Somparé and General Kerfalla Camara for having allegedly met and possibly planned a takeover.

Lamine Sidimé – A former prime minister (1999-2004) and now president (chief justice) of the Supreme Court, he is constitutionally in a position to declare Conté incapable of fulfilling his functions. A jurist and close associate of the president, he was appointed in August 2005 to replace Alphonse Aboly, who died in a car crash, when Conté reportedly was drifting in and out of a coma. He has the power to extend the 60-day interim period in case of a succession, as likely would be desirable to allow preparations for free and fair elections to be made, but he and other key members of the PUP, including acting President Somparé, would probably see it in their interests to keep that period as short as possible.

C. MILITARY

General Kerfalla Camara – An ethnic Sosso officer of Conté's generation and one of the few 1984 putschists who brought Conté to power still on active duty, he was invited to visit the French Ministry of Defence in February 2006 and appears to have received a clear message on the necessity of supporting a transition in conformity with the constitution.

²⁰ S. Samb, "Guinea's Conte sacks PM, overturns reshuffle", Reuters, 5 April 2006.

²¹ At the time of Touré's death, Somparé was Guinea's ambassador to France.

²² Although he officially denied it, multiple sources indicated that Somparé held a series of meetings with officers immediately after Conté's departure to Switzerland, purportedly in an attempt to reach an agreement about a constitutional succession, which everyone in Guinea understands will only be possible if the military gives the green light.

²³ All major opposition parties except Jean Marie Doré's *Union pour le Progrès de la Guinée* (UPG) boycotted the last legislative election.

General Arafane Camara – Of the younger generation, an ethnic Maninka (Malinke) and personally close to Conté, he could be the ideal new face in a military takeover that some actors feel they could live with.

Generals Bailo Daillo and Abdourhamane Diallo – They were the two highest-ranking ethnic Fulbe in the army but both were cashiered at the end of 2005. Bailo, who has considerable rank-and-file support, is said to have been surprised and angry. He could play a role in a post-Conté scenario as a leader of Fulbe ethnic interests, but possibly also as a leader pushed forward by junior officers against Kerfala Camara or Arafane Camara.

D. OPPOSITION

Mamadou Bah (often written Bah Mamadou) – President of the *Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée* (UFDG) party and leading opposition leader from the Fulbe ethnic group, he has been less visible recently in public life.

Ousmane Bah – He inherited leadership of the *Union pour le Progrès et le Renouveau* (UPR) party created by Siriadiou Diallo, the only opposition party still sitting in parliament at the time of the December 2005 municipal elections. Its twenty members walked out to protest electoral fraud, even though the UPR was the second most successful party, winning the mayorships of Telimélé and Fria.

Alpha Condé – A leading opponent, ethnic Maninka, and academic by training, Condé has spent most of the 26-year Sékou Touré period and the 22-year Conté period in France because of persistent arrests and attacks. Conté has treated him as the main threat to his power and jailed him for two years on spurious charges after the 1998 elections. Condé returned to Guinea in 2005 and is positioning himself for a post-Conté attempt at power, possibly in collaboration with the military, a scenario that might lead to significant civil strife, possibly even civil war. Although he has strong support among ethnic Maninka, many ethnic Fulbe and *Forestiers* (those from the small ethnic groups in the southeastern rainforest zone) say they would sooner die than accept another Maninka president (Sékou Touré was Maninka, and quite abusive toward those groups).

Many diplomats see Condé as “the leading opposition figure in Guinea”, a position solidified by his *Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée* (RPG) party’s victory in three major towns – Kankan, Kouroussa, and Faranah – in the December 2005 elections. Many Guineans, including Maninka, reproach him for spending much his adult life in Europe.

Jean Marie Doré – He has cultivated a fiery rhetoric and a sometimes outlandish persona. A genuine intellectual, he

hails from the Forest region, where he has a small ethnic constituency. His hyperbolic criticism without offering meaningful alternatives (he was the only leading opposition figure to refuse to participate in the National Consultation), have earned him a reputation as the country’s leading gadfly but not its potential leader.

Sidya Touré – The ex-prime minister is one of the two leading opposition figures. A Diahanke (an ethnic group that is less than 1 per cent of the population), he gets most of his support from the coast, the same region from which Conté (and General Kerfala Camara) hail. His ethnicity is not divisive but his base is small, both because he has no “natural” ethnic support and because he has done little to cultivate a position in the interior. His party probably should have won most if not all of the five mayoral positions in the Conakry region but were cheated by Conté’s PUP. It did take Boffa, Touré’s home town. Touré, who also served in Ouattara’s cabinet during his long exile in Côte d’Ivoire, is a businessman and technocrat and considered one of the only successful Guinean prime ministers (1996-1998).

IV. WHAT NEXT?

A. SUCCESSION SCENARIOS

There are three plausible succession variants: military takeover, constitutional succession, interim transitional government. Constitutional succession is preferable but at least a civilian transition is essential.

Military takeover. There would likely be immediate and fairly unanimous opposition, as happened in 2005 during Togo’s succession crisis. However, even unanimous pressure would not be certain to force a stand-down. Although most African regional bodies (such as the AU) and Western governments continue officially to disapprove of the August 2005 coup in Mauritania, relations have largely normalised because of the perception that the coup has local support and legitimacy. The Guinean population might ultimately accept a military takeover, and even show signs of welcoming it, but that would be because it meant the departure of the old regime, not because there was unqualified support for the new one.²⁴ International actors should not interpret such signs, if they occur, as reason for accepting a coup. Many of Guinea’s problems have come from the lack of institutional strength that has gone hand-in-hand with the personalisation of power. A new putschist, no matter how seemingly well intentioned, would reinforce that tendency.

²⁴ See Gareth Evans and Mike McGovern, “Guinea: No Coups Are Good Coups”, allAfrica.com, 22 March 2006.

Just as Mauritania is a poor model for Guinea, so is Togo. Over the last year, many West African political figures have referred to Togo as a “dress rehearsal” for Guinea’s succession.²⁵ The first half of the reaction to the Togolese coup (rejecting the army’s installation of Gnassingbé Eyadéma’s son, Faure, as president) was helpful but was followed by a cynical quid pro quo. In return for following the letter of the constitution, it appears that the military and civilian elites that installed Faure Gnassingbé were given the green light to rig the elections, thus trampling over the spirit of the constitution and achieving the same results as the initial coup. The Guinean transition should be held to a higher standard.

Constitutional succession. Key questions that would emerge are who should preside as interim leader and for how long. As described above, National Assembly President Aboubacar Somparé would be the constitutionally-mandated interim leader but his intentions are suspect. The interim period defined by the constitution is a rather short 60 days. The Togolese case showed that the party in power is likely to be able to use a short period to reinstall itself. The advances made in preparation for the December 2005 elections have improved the situation in Guinea. There are transparent voting urns and an electoral commission, though a flawed one; opposition parties have had liberty to circulate and meet freely (a novelty in Guinean politics). The further improvements needed to ensure that Guinea’s next elections are fair – photographic voter ID cards, revision of electoral lists, institutional independence and empowerment of the electoral commission – have been discussed above. Moving forward with them now should be an immediate priority.

Depending where the process is when a possible succession takes place, however, 60 further days may well be insufficient to complete it. If so, the international community should press for the president of the Supreme Court to use his power to lengthen the transition period.

Interim transitional government. The National Consultation proposed that any power vacuum should be filled for eighteen months by a “neutral, consensual” prime minister in charge of the government, while a “Republican Court of Justice” would replace the Supreme Court, an “independent” electoral commission would replace the present “autonomous” electoral commission, and a “Republican National Council” would replace the National Legislature.²⁶ The whole would be overseen by an

“International Observatory”, with ECOWAS, UN and AU representatives.

While electoral commission changes are necessary for fair elections, replacing the Supreme Court and National Assembly with bodies having essentially the same functions but different titles and personnel more to the liking of the opposition parties and civil society appears to underestimate the depth of the political crisis. Fundamental changes cannot be achieved by fiat. Indeed politics by fiat is one of Guinea’s main problems. Thus, initial steps are needed now but it will take years for a truly independent, professional judiciary to emerge. Moreover, actors from the standing government will have to be included if a civilian succession is to have a chance to succeed. A plan that takes their immediate removal as a starting point weakens the possibility of a civilian transition and strengthens the chances they will do a deal with the military to stay in power.

B. THE MILITARY, THE POLITICAL CLASS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

A more productive approach would be along the two parallel tracks described above. While mutually dependent, these tracks would be conceptually and technically separate and follow different timelines. The first, which should begin at once with changes in the electoral commission, new voter cards and revised electoral lists, would be oriented toward facilitating transparent elections, whenever they come. This political-technocratic track would seek to establish conditions that would make free and fair elections possible.

Movement along the second track has already begun, in the context of the general strike and the National Consultation. It should be oriented toward long-term socio-economic as well as political changes that would allow real openness and democracy to flourish. The process must be seen as gradual and cumulative, and its full fruits would not emerge for many years. Without advances on this track, technical electoral improvements are meaningless.

Those who would turn a blind eye to a coup, arguing for stability rather than risking potentially destabilising change, are not necessarily cynical but their position is the product of shallow analysis. Guineans have shown political maturity in pushing for change but systematically stopping short of using mass violence to obtain it. This is often taken by outsiders for fatalism, and there is some of the inertia common to many countries that have had lengthy dictatorships. However, the unhappy revolutionary experiences of neighbouring Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire have contributed to a conscious reluctance to follow such a path. The difficulty has been to forge

²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Dakar, Conakry, Accra, Abuja, 2005-2006.

²⁶ An obvious problem is how the interim prime minister and other authorities would be chosen. Crisis Group interview, EU official, Brussels, 26 March 2006.

space for peaceful dialogue in a country where the government represses such dialogue, most citizens reject violent revolt, civil society has been underdeveloped, spending most of its time scrabbling for a few donor crumbs, and the struggle for the next meal has been an increasing preoccupation of the general population.

In this context, the general strike and the National Consultation are very significant. They have been made possible because the government has eased up on many repressive techniques. This, too, is an advance. Leadership is the greatest weakness in the equation. The country is full of impressive, charismatic figures. Each has his or her supporters and detractors but none has yet taken the kinds of risks true leadership will require. They, like everyone else, have been living in an environment hostile to initiatives by anyone but President Conté. It is time, however, for Guinea's would-be leaders to come forward with their platforms and their vision for the nation's future.

This future will have to involve some attempts to grapple with the country's difficult past. A political transition, however smooth its beginnings, risks collapse if Guineans do not eventually come to terms with the violence of the last 48 years. Though Sékou Touré rightly focussed Guineans' attention on the injustice and abuses of the colonial period, the rhetoric of anti-imperialism was too often accompanied by purges of the latest counterrevolutionary suspects; nearly every family has members who were beaten, arrested, tortured or killed during that time. Its violence has been replaced by the wanton pillage of the present era but these issues remain nearly taboo, especially among intellectuals.

This is why Robert Sarah, former Archbishop of Conakry, now at the Vatican, would be an ideal choice to chair a National Conference, or a continuation of the National Consultation. His frank and honest evaluation of the situation in Guinea over the years has brought him admiration and credibility. His standing is as high among Guinea's approximately 85 per cent Muslim majority as among Christians.²⁷ The Vatican's caution about the involvement of Catholic clergy in overtly political activities is said to have been part of the reason Msgr. Sarah was brought to Rome. However, if the process is separated into two distinct tracks, one dealing directly with election-related issues, the other whose goal is to facilitate broad

dialogue around the future of the country, his participation in the latter might be less problematic for the Vatican.²⁸ Guinean civil society representatives and the Sant'Egidio Community, which does humanitarian work in Guinea, could approach the Holy See to inquire into the possibility.

C. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Those interested in staging a coup in Guinea will have learned lessons in 2005 from Mauritania and especially Togo. The military may grab power or put forward a civilian front man, probably in a crude way. Guinea has been governed so badly for so long that instead of seeing the approaching end of the Conté era as an opportunity, most diplomats (African and European alike) are in a conservative posture, looking for the least bad option. Like anyone else, Guineans will tend to rise as high as the bar is set. If it is set at a low level, the results will be mediocre. However, a convergence of factors – the general strike and National Consultation, but also the modest but real advances in the second half of 2005 – allows hope for much more.

It is important to be clear in advance. The EU and U.S. have signalled that they will reject and isolate a military government that has taken over by force. The AU is required by its internal rules to isolate a government that emerges from a coup. ECOWAS has congratulated itself on forcing the army in Togo to abandon its full-fledged coup and achieve the same results through nominally legal means. That the elections that brought Faure Gnassingbé back to power were judged fraudulent by many,²⁹ caused at least 400 deaths according to the UN, and created some 40,000 refugees in Ghana and Benin does not seem to have tempered this view. If ECOWAS makes clear that it will support the spirit as well as the letter of a constitutional succession in Guinea, it will make a difference in the army's calculations.³⁰

²⁷ Throughout his tenure as archbishop, Msgr Sarah's Christmas homily, published in newspapers and distributed on cassette, was eagerly awaited by Guineans of all denominations. His frank and clear-sighted sermon on Christmas 2000, regarding the government's partial responsibility for cross-border attacks from Liberia and Sierra Leone (because of its support for the LURD rebels who were attacking Charles Taylor's Liberia), was an especially bold and widely discussed statement.

²⁸ There are precedents: Msgr de Souza presided over the National Conference in Benin in 1990, and Msgr Monsengue, Archbishop of Kisangani, was chair of the National Sovereign Conference that sought to open the door for democratisation in Mobutu's Zaire.

²⁹ The EU, though not official observers, felt obliged to comment on widespread fraud. The West African Civil Society Organisation Forum, though housed within ECOWAS, strongly disagreed when ECOWAS concluded that the elections were "satisfactory" despite the fact that its observers did not witness the count of the votes, and armed men stole urns in various parts of Lomé, an opposition stronghold.

³⁰ Sceptics argue that Guinea's military and political elites do not care what others think of them. However, they are more exposed than ever before in the wake of the general strike, and

International actors who may support a quasi-military takeover have had allies among the Guinean opposition, who have at various times called for a military take-over. This must not be used as an excuse to accept a coup with a nudge and wink. As a French observer noted, "some political parties, conscious of their weakness, may prefer dealing with the army rather than enter the field in an open competition".³¹ Internationals should not allow themselves to be dragged into this game, which would only end badly in the medium term.

Approaches to Guinea over the next months should be oriented in the first instance toward facilitating dialogue among the widest possible spectrum of society, including the military but without allowing it to monopolise the dialogue. Diplomacy should encourage – indeed demand – that would-be leaders come forward with platforms expressing concrete strategies and visions. Donors should facilitate quick progress on the technical aspects of electoral reform, and if the president should die or be incapacitated at an early date, they should press for elections to be delayed until parties have adequate time to mobilise their campaigns.

V. CONCLUSION

It seems likely, though not certain, that Guinea will experience a political transition before the 2007 legislative elections. If so, it is vitally important to build on the three major advances that have taken place in the last six months. The first of these are the important but incomplete political reforms instituted to revise electoral lists, open the airwaves to privately owned television and radio stations and establish an electoral commission.

The second advance was the December 2005 municipal elections. Despite serious fraud, they should be considered a practice run for the next poll, whether legislative or presidential. Much remains to be done here, too, especially in terms of providing all voters with photographic identity cards to replace the selectively distributed "attestations de residence".

Thirdly, the general strike and National Consultation have placed the trade unions and professional and civil society organisations, in a pivotal position. The last such groundswell was during the women's revolt of 1977, which significantly eased the most repressive period (1968-1977) of the Sékou Touré years. Timing makes this especially

significant because cynics who have supported a military takeover on the grounds that there were no viable alternatives can now be answered: "There are alternatives, here they are, and this is the platform that has been proposed".

This opens a new chapter in Guinean history. Whether this coalition of actors will remain bound by their common vision remains to be seen. Convincing the government and the army to join them as equal partners will require renunciation of all manner of looting rights. None of this will be easy for this new civilian group, emergent and fragile as it is, but this is where outside actors should come into play: It is only by making absolutely clear that a military takeover will not be accepted that the Guinean military may be forced to begin negotiating seriously with civilian actors.

Guinea's civil society has begun to take matters into its own hands. One may easily remark that it is "about time", but it is working against daunting odds. The state security forces have not hesitated to jail and beat activists, who have mostly been left unfunded and to their own devices by the international community, while the citizenry they are working to mobilise has been demoralised and distracted by the struggle for the next meal. If anything like the per capita aid that has been pumped into Eastern European and Central Asian civil society had been made available in this post-socialist setting, matters might be quite different. Such support should now be made available as part of a two-pronged international approach that includes clear signals a military takeover would be unanimously rejected. These are essential preconditions for a peaceful transition, and Guineans suddenly appear ready to start the discussions that would make such a transition possible.

Dakar/Brussels, 11 April 2006

if they find themselves entirely without allies, they will almost certainly be forced to allow a legal transition.

³¹ Crisis Group correspondence with French journalist, 19 March 2006.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF GUINEA



APPENDIX B

FINAL DECLARATION OF THE NATIONAL FORUM OF GUINEAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

CONTEXT

The National Forum of Guinean Civil Society Organisations organised by the National Council of Guinean Civil Society Organisations with the support of IFES and USAID was held from 10-12 March 2006 in Conakry on the theme, "Civil Society and the Democratisation Process: Issues and Perspectives". This meeting brought together more than 150 leaders of civil society structures (organisations, peasants, NGOs, unions, professional associations, youth, women, religious organisations and others) coming from the seven administrative regions of Guinea and Conakry.

This Forum took place after the local elections of 18 December 2006 and the general strike held from 27 February to 3 March and as we look towards the legislative elections of 2007.

The Forum focused on the following themes during panels and working groups:

- ❑ election democracy in Africa;
- ❑ the ECOWAS Additional Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy;
- ❑ the roles and responsibilities of civil society in the electoral process;
- ❑ local governance and the electoral process;
- ❑ evaluation of the emergence of a more visible civil society with respect to the democratisation and electoral processes;
- ❑ civil society: peace and security; and
- ❑ what should be the institutional evolution of associations in Guinea.

Assertions

- ❑ The Forum commends Guinean citizens for the maturity they demonstrated during the general strike of their colleagues from the labour movement and the strong mass mobilisation and exemplary solidarity that they generated. Participants unanimously recognised that in a democratic regime, one of the most delicate and troubling processes is the conduct of elections.
- ❑ The lack of knowledge about the ECOWAS Additional Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy and the need to disseminate it and promote its implementation.
- ❑ The need to broaden local governance and the elections so that they are not the exclusive responsibility of the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following their work, the Forum made the following recommendations:

With Respect to the Electoral Process

1. revision of the Electoral Code to allow the creation of a supervisory and control structure that will be involved in each stage of the electoral process; the revision of the [government's] financing for political parties; the more equitable division of the electoral districts; and ending voting stations in military camps;
2. preparation of a new electoral list and its systematic revision each year;

3. mandatory voter registration of women and youth eighteen years of age and above and the distribution to them of voting cards;
4. continuous education and sensitisation of all citizens about the electoral process;
5. institutionalisation of National Election Observers with broader responsibilities and their effective involvement in all stages of the electoral process;
6. establishment of quotas for youth and women candidates on the electoral slates of the political parties; and
7. decentralisation of the distribution of voting cards, which should be provided free of charge.

With Respect to Decentralisation/Local Governance

1. consensus decision-making the basis for democracy at the local level;
2. revision of the texts on decentralisation with respect to the appointment of heads of neighbourhoods and district chiefs and with respect to the relationships between the sub-prefects and the presidents of the rural development councils;
3. dissemination and implementation of the provisions on decentralisation; and
4. greater participation of women and youth in civil society at the local level.

With Respect to Security

1. application of all laws and conventions (adopted by the state);
2. strengthened involvement of civil society in the electoral process and in conflict prevention;
3. establishment of a better equilibrium in the commercial distribution systems;
4. revision of the code for land tenure and creation of a land tenure system for rural areas;
5. creation of communication mechanisms that support social cohesion;
6. fostering the exchange of information and collaboration between civil society and security forces; and
7. use of traditional mechanisms for conflict prevention.

With Respect to the Various Stakeholders

□ The State

1. ensure that the law is enforced;
2. support institutional and capacity development of civil society;
3. involve civil society in drafting Law no. L/O13/2005 establishing the rules for associations in the Republic of Guinea;
4. foster a tripartite dialogue among civil society, political parties and the state on the electoral process;
5. support access to identity cards;
6. allow independents to be candidates in local elections;
7. train administration officials in what constitutes a democratic culture and [political] neutrality;
8. ensure greater visibility for civil society with respect to the state and political parties, including the government party;
9. respect the separation of power in the Republic institutions [executive, legislative and judicial], each of which should carry out their full responsibilities vis-à-vis citizens; and

10. appoint a mediator³² for the Republic of Guinea.

□ **Political Parties**

1. ensure the training of their supporters;
2. create and disseminate genuine party platforms;
3. recognise and collaborate with civil society;
4. promote the participation of youth and women in political parties; and
5. promote social dialogue.

□ **Civil Society**

1. act to strengthen visibility and credibility;
2. ensure the creation of transparent and qualified election officials;
3. reinforce collaboration and synergy among civil society organisations;
4. advocate greater civil society participation at all stages of the electoral process;
5. educate the population on its rights and responsibilities;
6. develop information and communication (community radio) tools;
7. identify mechanisms for conflict prevention and ensure that they are used;
8. promote the creation of permanent mechanisms for tripartite consultations on all questions of national interest;
9. establish consultation mechanisms among civil society and security forces for the prevention and management of conflicts; and
10. mobilise to ensure that the Constitution is known and respected.

Done at Conakry, 12 March 2006

³² It would be the mediator's responsibility to move the process forward in the case of any impasse between the government and other stakeholders.

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