

Guinea: Putting the Transition Back on Track International Crisis Group 23 September 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS After the election of Alpha Condé to the presidency in November 2010, legislative elections are set to complete a new phase in Guinea's political transition. However, recent violent ethnic politics and the political actors' mistrust in the electoral arrangements are cause for concern. Condé's unilateral move to overhaul the electoral system has gained little praise, and with his party's gloomy prospects for the legislative elections, suspicion is increasing. He has done too little too late to promote reconciliation or dialogue with the opposition. Guinea can afford neither a makeshift electoral system, nor a new campaign based on ethnic factors. Rising pre-electoral tensions could spark inter-communal violence and offer an opportunity to take action for those in the army unhappy about loss of power. The 19 July military attack launched by some soldiers on the presidential residence confirmed this is a real possibility. A genuine agreement between the main political actors on the organisation of the legislative elections is crucial and urgent. Without the international community's significant involvement, chances of success are slim.

Condé's accession to power provided an extraordinary opportunity to end 50 years of authoritarianism and economic stagnation. The new government faces immense challenges with limited means, even if donors seem prepared to increase aid. The failure of the 19 July attempt against the president's life indicates that, for the moment at least, it has the military hierarchy's support. Condé has consolidated the normalisation process begun by his predecessor, General Sékouba Konaté, and sent the army back to the barracks and away from Conakry. The imposition of heavy security measures since 19 July, however, has set the process back. Security sector reform is still at a preliminary stage. The new authorities show willingness to provide good economic and financial governance, but strict budgetary discipline will depress the economy, at least in the short term, so they are trying to compensate by responding to social demands, importing food and improving electricity supply. There are indications of an ambitious long-term economic restructuring program.

On the other hand, it is only recently that dialogue with the opposition has begun and some conciliatory gestures have been made. For example, on 15 August the president met with one of the leading opposition representatives for the first time since the election. He plays both sides though, for example accusing the main opposition party of being responsible for the 19 July attack before the judiciary has even looked into the case and long ignoring, before rejecting it, a memorandum about the organisation of the elections handed by the opposition to the government on 17 August.

The legacy of his own election is cause for some concern, including for the legislative contests, because it gave new impetus to the idea that Guinea's history is a struggle between its four major ethno-regional blocs. In the first round, most politicians started by organising their own communities. The second round – during which ethnic rhetoric built steadily on all sides – was a scarcely disguised debate on supposed Peul domination, with Condé, a Malinké, attributing

hegemonic ambitions to that community from which his opponent and the main opposition party leader, Cellou Dalein Diallo, comes. Although the security forces were responsible for the worst violence, political mobilisation along ethnic lines sparked clashes and claimed victims. Organisational weaknesses of the electoral process fed these tensions by allowing mutual accusations of fraud at every stage.

The new government has done little to cope with this grim legacy and been slow to organise the legislative elections, which are indispensable for completing the institutional arrangements required by the constitution. It kept quiet for months about the elections procedure, until, on 15 September, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) suggested they be held on 29 December 2011. However, the authorities had already begun to overhaul the electoral register, made changes to the INEC and redefined the division of labour between it and the territorial administration ministry. The National Transition Council (an interim legislative body) and civil society tried to mediate, and under domestic and international pressure, the authorities finally called for consultations and abandoned the creation of a new electoral register. The initiation of a dialogue has not so far enabled any agreement on the bones of contention: the composition and functioning of the INEC, the electoral register and the elections date. (...)

RECOMMENDATIONS

To President Condé:

1. Engage in direct and periodic political dialogue with the leaders of the most important parties (those that received more than a certain percentage of the votes in the first round of the presidential election, 5 per cent, for example), at least until the legislative assembly is in place.
2. Refrain from ambiguous and dangerous rhetoric accusing unidentified citizens of “sabotaging” government actions; avoid misusing his prestige as an opponent of authoritarian regimes as justification to avoid the political debate that is indispensable for a democratic system; and take a clear public stand against the ethnically-laden provocative speeches by some of his allies and supporters.
3. Avoid any political statement which may be understood as interfering with the judicial process for investigating the 19 July attack.

To the Guinean Government:

4. Work with opposition parties, especially the Union of Guinean Democratic Forces (Union des

forces démocratiques de Guinée, UFDG) and the Union of Republican Forces (Union des forces républicaines, UFR), to seek a genuine consensus about the electoral process, including the calendar, the voters register and the Electoral Commission.

5. Continue to accept the National Transition Council (NTC) as a legitimate legislative partner until the National Assembly starts functioning, as set out in the constitution.

6. Prepare draft organic bills on the institutions required by the constitution, especially the Supreme Judicial Council, the Supreme Court and the Economic and Social Council.

7. Guarantee the freedom to demonstrate, a constitutional right.

8. Continue efforts to promote good governance and implement commitments made to this effect, notably publication of mining contracts and asset declarations by the president and ministers.

9. Continue the fight against impunity by both:

a) increasing the resources available to the judges investigating the massacre of 28 September 2009 and ensuring independence and fairness of the judicial process, as well as witness protection; and

b) continuing efforts to punish abuses of power committed routinely by members of the security forces.

10. Proceed expeditiously with security sector reform, including by transforming strategic plans into concrete actions and by taking into account all the security actors, among which the almost 6,000 young men recruited by Moussa Dadis Camara.

To the opposition parties:

11. Accept government proposals for dialogue on the electoral process and other important issues without insisting that strict observance of the constitution is the answer to all the country's problems.

12. Play a constructive role in the NTC and use this forum to defend their positions.
13. Cease questioning the legitimacy of President Condé's election.
14. Take a clear, public position against the escalation of ethnic tensions promoted by some of their supporters.

To the Independent National Electoral Commission:

15. Prepare, in cooperation with civil society, a code of conduct to be signed by all political parties contesting the elections, committing them to refrain from any comment that risks stirring up inter-communal tensions during the campaign, and ensure it is widely available to citizens.
(...)

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