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Following independence from France in 1958, Guinea was ruled by successive dictatorships. Its first leader was from the Malinké ethnic group, comprising 30 per cent of the population; no one from the largest ethnic group, the Peuhl (40 per cent of the population) has ever led the country. In 2010, Guineans had their first real opportunity to choose their leader: in that contest Alpha Condé, a Malinké, narrowly defeated his main opponent, a Peuhl, leading to intercommunal violence.

Elections to choose the first National Assembly in five years, thereby completing the transition to civilian rule begun with presidential polls in 2010, were announced for May 2013. This led to increased tensions between the government of President Condé and the opposition, which accuses the former of illegitimacy and discrimination against its own ethnic Peuhl base.

Intermarriage between ethnic groups in Guinea is common, and many Guineans have mixed ancestry. Ethnic divisions, which have sharpened in recent years, appear to be rooted in competition for public resources and have been further exacerbated by political elections. A protest march over the electoral process led to clashes between Peuhl and Malinké in the capital Conakry in February and March. At least five people were killed in incidents that at times involved security forces.

Religious and other leaders called for calm. The political parties signed a joint declaration of non-violence in April, committing to peaceful means for resolving disputes. However, after more demonstrations in May, some of which led to ethnic violence in which at least a dozen people were killed and scores injured, including by security forces, the polls were postponed. Amid ongoing tensions, in July the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution calling for peace and condemning all incitement to ethnic or racial hatred. Elections went off peacefully in September; however delays in issuing results led to accusations from the opposition of potential fraud.

In other developments, in July, violent intercommunal clashes between members of the Guerze and Konianke minority ethnic groups in N'Nzérékoré and Beyla districts reportedly killed over 50

people, with over 150 more injured. The clashes were believed to have begun after a dispute in which two Guerze killed a Konianke they accused of theft. Mosques and churches were attacked during three days of violence.

Finally, several serving government ministers were indicted on charges of murder, rape and other crimes in the context of the 2009 stadium massacre in Conakry. Human rights activists welcomed the charges as an important step for justice and an end to impunity in the country, but expressed concerns that the accused remained in their high-level posts. The indictments centre around an incident that took place following the death in 2008 of dictator Lansana Conté, a member of the Soussou minority. A group of primarily Malinké army officers took power by military coup, promising elections but then announcing their leader's intention to run. In September 2009, a peaceful opposition protest in Conakry stadium was brutally dispersed by security forces and militia. In several days of violence, at least 150 people were killed and scores of women raped. The majority of victims were reported to be Peuhl.

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