

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Freedom in the World - Guinea (2008)

Capital:
Conakry

Population:
10,100,000

Political Rights Score: 6
Civil Liberties Score: 5
Status: Not Free

Overview

A general strike to protest corruption and the high price of basic goods spiraled into a near-revolt in January and February 2007. In spite of the government's attempts to crush the demonstrations using brute force, the unrest continued until President Lansana Conte agreed to appoint Lansana Kouyate, an experienced diplomat, as prime minister with executive powers. While Kouyate's appointment was applauded within Guinea and abroad, he faced an uphill battle to improve government services, stem inflation, and assert civilian control over the security forces.

Under Ahmed Sekou Toure, Guinea declared independence from France in 1958. Alone among France's many African colonies, Guinea rejected continued close ties with France. Paris retaliated quickly, removing or destroying all "colonial property" and enforcing an unofficial but devastating economic boycott. Sekou Toure's one-party rule became highly repressive, and Guinea grew increasingly impoverished under his Soviet-style economic policies. Lansana Conte seized power in a 1984 coup, and won the country's first multiparty presidential elections in 1993. He captured just over 51 percent of the vote, but international observers said the polls were deeply flawed.

After putting down a 1996 army mutiny, Conte was returned to office in a 1998 vote marked by state patronage, media that strongly backed the incumbent, broad manipulation of the electoral process, and opposition disunity. Hundreds of people were arrested after the vote, including the official third-place finisher, Alpha Conde. The 2002 People's National Assembly elections, in which the ruling Party for Unity and Progress (PUP) easily won a two-thirds majority, were undermined by an opposition boycott and the government's control of the electoral system. Major opposition parties also boycotted the 2003 presidential election, in which Conte won a third term amid criticism from international observers. The PUP won 272 out of 341 seats in December 2005 municipal elections, as the opposition claimed massive fraud. The Union of Progress and Renewal (UPR), the only opposition party represented in the legislature, withdrew from the body in protest in January 2006.

In early 2007, a general strike to protest corruption, the high cost of basic goods, and the poor provision of government services turned into nationwide antigovernment demonstrations. The protests were sparked in part by Conte's personal intervention to free his close associate, influential businessman Mamadou Sylla, from imprisonment on corruption-related charges. Under pressure to end the unrest, Conte agreed to invest some executive powers in a new prime minister—the position had remained vacant since April 2006, when Conte sacked then prime

minister Cellou Dalein Diallo. However, when a Conte ally, Eugene Camara, was named to the post, the protests resumed and spiraled into a near-revolt of unprecedented scale. Security forces opened fire on demonstrators, killing over 100, and martial law was declared in February. The media were also targeted, as security forces took control of the state broadcaster, raided two private radio stations, and arrested several local journalists.

Union leaders agreed to suspend the strikes in late February, and Conte tapped Lansana Kouyate, an experienced diplomat who was seen as politically neutral, to replace Camara. The appointment was greeted with optimism within Guinea and abroad, particularly as Kouyate organized a new cabinet that excluded several officials who were notorious for their abuses of power. However, he faced an uphill battle to address the economic and political roots of the unrest, including deeply entrenched corruption, uncontrolled security forces, and a lack of basic infrastructure. In addition, concern remained over the possible consequences if Conte, who rarely appeared in public and was rumored to suffer from grave illness, were to die before the expiration of his term in 2010.

Guinea is one of the world's largest producers of bauxite and is also rich in gold, diamonds, and iron ore. However, corruption, mismanagement, and conflict have negatively affected the economy, and lenders have shunned Guinea for bad governance and improper fiscal practices. Kouyate's administration made economic reforms and improved donor relations a priority, announcing in April 2007 that the government would review Guinea's notoriously opaque mining contracts. In July, foreign donors including the World Bank and the European Union pledged over \$400 million in antipoverty assistance.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Guinea is not an electoral democracy. In the 2003 presidential election, President Lansana Conte, who reportedly captured more than 90 percent of the vote, faced only one relatively unknown opponent; a Supreme Court panel had disqualified six other candidates for reasons ranging from a failure to pay the application fee to questionable dates of birth. The main opposition parties boycotted the election. The president benefits from unlimited seven-year terms in office and the power to appoint local officials and Supreme Court judges. The 114 members of the unicameral People's National Assembly are elected by direct popular vote to serve five-year terms. Some political reforms were enacted after the president appointed Lansana Kouyate as prime minister in February 2007, following antigovernment protests. For example, in June, the National Assembly approved the creation of an Independent National Electoral Commission.

Conte's PUP controls much of the government as well as substantial patronage networks in the military and civil bureaucracy. Opposition parties include the UPR, which was the only opposition party represented in parliament after the 2002 elections; the Union of Republican Forces (URF), led by former prime minister Sidya Toure; and the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea, of which former prime minister Cellou Dalein Diallo was appointed leader in November 2007.

The cabinet and the military leadership include members of all major ethnic groups, but a disproportionate number of senior military officers belong to Conte's Soussou ethnic group, according to the U.S. State Department. The ruling party is more ethnically integrated than opposition parties, which have clear regional and ethnic bases. The International Crisis Group warned in 2003 that squabbling for

power among Guinea's three main ethnic groups—the Soussou, Peuhl, and Malinke—and among the country's different political and military factions could plunge the country into violence.

Corruption has been cited as a serious problem in the country by both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Kouyate's administration initiated a review of all government mining contracts, canceling several dozen in November 2007, though many government activities continue to be shrouded in secrecy. Guinea was ranked 168 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Conte's administration has maintained tight controls over the local press. The government has wide powers to bar any communications that allegedly insult the president or disturb the peace, and defamation and slander are considered criminal offenses. Foreign-based publications, such as the French news weekly *Jeune Afrique L'Intelligent*, are occasionally seized by authorities before distribution if they carry articles on sensitive topics, such as the president's health. Guinea was the last country in West Africa to allow independent broadcasting, granting licenses to the country's first private radio stations in August 2006. When martial law was declared in February 2007, security forces raided two of the stations and arrested several journalists in apparent retaliation for critical programming. Internet access is unrestricted, but exists almost solely in urban areas.

Constitutionally protected religious rights are respected in practice, though the main body representing the country's Muslim majority is government controlled. Academic freedom is generally respected, but the government influences hiring and curriculum content.

Several statutes restrict freedoms of association and assembly in apparent contravention of the constitution; the government may ban any gathering that "threatens national unity." Nevertheless, human rights groups and many other nongovernmental organizations operate openly. The constitution provides for the right to form and join unions. Several labor confederations compete and have the right to bargain collectively. An eight-day general strike in 2006 resulted in rioting and alleged human rights abuses by the authorities, and ended with an agreement on wages and prices for basic goods. Trade unions demonstrated immense political influence in early 2007, when nationwide strikes led Conte to assign some executive powers to a newly appointed prime minister.

While nominally independent, the judicial system remains affected by corruption, nepotism, ethnic bias, and political interference, and lacks resources and trained personnel. Arbitrary arrests and detention are common, and persistent maltreatment and torture of detainees have been reported. Prison conditions are harsh and sometimes life threatening. Security forces commit abuses, including extrajudicial execution, with impunity. Human Rights Watch reported that during a crackdown on the antigovernment demonstrations in early 2007, "security forces fired directly into crowds of unarmed demonstrators, frequently before having exhausted non-lethal means of crowd control, and also gunned down demonstrators trying to flee to safety," leaving at least 129 people dead and nearly 2,000 wounded.

Women have far fewer educational and employment opportunities than men, and many societal customs discriminate against women. Constitutionally protected

women's rights are often unrealized. Women have access to land, credit, and business, but inheritance laws favor men. In 2007, Human Rights Watch reported that thousands of young girls in Guinea were being abused as unpaid domestic workers, and were subject to beatings or rape by their employers. Advocacy groups are working to eradicate the illegal but widespread practice of female genital mutilation.