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Freedom in the World 2010 - Guinea

Capital: Conakry

Population: 10,058,000

Political Rights Score: 7 *

Civil Liberties Score: 6 *

Status: Not Free

Ratings Change

Guinea's civil liberties rating declined from 5 to 6 due to the military junta's repressive measures, including the massacre of more than 150 opposition protesters in September and the use of rape as a means of political intimidation.

Overview

Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, the leader of a military junta that took power in December 2008, refused in 2009 to adhere to an initial promise that he would not run in the presidential election set for early 2010. His erratic and repressive rule during the year culminated in the massacre of more than 150 opposition protesters in September. The incident, which also featured brutal rapes and beatings by security forces, triggered an investigation by the United Nations as well as a series of international sanctions. In December, Camara was shot and seriously injured by one of his officers, and the consequences remained uncertain at year's end.

Guinea gained independence from France in 1958 and grew increasingly impoverished under the repressive, one-party rule of President Ahmed Sekou Toure. After his death in 1984, a military junta led by Lieutenant Colonel Lansana Conte abolished all political parties and the constitution, and began a program of economic liberalization.

A new constitution was adopted in 1990. Conte won the country's first multiparty presidential elections in 1993, but international observers said the polls were deeply flawed. Presidential, legislative, and municipal elections over the next 12 years were similarly marred by state patronage, media bias, broad manipulation of the electoral process, and opposition boycotts; all resulted in lopsided victories for Conte and the ruling Party for Unity and Progress (PUP).

In early 2007, a general strike to protest corruption, the cost of basic goods, and inadequate government services grew into nationwide antigovernment demonstrations. Security forces opened fire on protesters, killing more than 130. The president agreed under pressure to vest some executive powers in a new prime minister, but named an

ally to the post in February and declared martial law when the choice stirred protests into a near-revolt of unprecedented scale. With mediation by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), union leaders agreed to suspend the general strike, while Conte pledged to control inflation, organize legislative elections, and name a "consensus" prime minister backed by unions and civil society. He appointed veteran diplomat Lansana Kouyate, but initial optimism faded as the prime minister's reform plan was stymied by structural challenges, back-room opposition from the president and his associates, and perceptions that Kouyate was pursuing his own political agenda.

In May 2008, Conte unilaterally dismissed Kouyate. A faction of the army mutinied later that month, and security forces brutally suppressed a police mutiny in June as well as sporadic antigovernment demonstrations by civilians. The ailing president died in December, and junior officers quickly mounted a successful military coup, promising to hold elections in two years.

Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, the coup leader, initially enjoyed considerable popularity, especially as he sought to expose corruption among former officials. However, his arbitrary and personalized style of rule quickly engendered opposition. In August, under international and domestic pressure, the ruling junta – known as the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD) – set presidential and legislative elections for January and March 2010, respectively. Camara began to hint that he might renege on his earlier promise not to run for president, and opposition forces mounted a massive rally in late September. The gathering was viciously suppressed by security forces, who killed more than 150 people and raped and beat hundreds of others. The international community, including ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union, and the United States, roundly condemned the crackdown and imposed sanctions on the Guinean regime. However, China broke ranks and signed a \$9 billion mining agreement with the junta in October.

In December, as the International Criminal Court and a special UN panel investigated the September massacre, the commander of Guinea's presidential guard shot Camara in the head, seriously injuring him. The country's leadership and the anticipated elections remained in doubt at year's end.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Guinea is not an electoral democracy. Elections under presidents Ahmed Sekou Toure and Lansana Conte were heavily manipulated, and the December 2008 military coup suspended all political activity, civilian government institutions, and the constitution. The resulting junta, the CNDD, promised to hold open presidential and legislative elections in early 2010, but those plans were in doubt after the September 2009 massacre of opposition supporters and the December assassination attempt on junta leader Moussa Dadis Camara.

There are several significant political parties, most of which have clear regional and ethnic bases. However, the country has no history of peaceful rotation of power, and prior to the 2008 coup, Conte's PUP controlled much of the government as well as substantial patronage networks in the military and civil bureaucracy.

Corruption has been cited as a serious problem by international donors, and many government activities are shrouded in secrecy. Guinea was ranked 168 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index. The CNDD promised to crack down on corruption, but instead it oversaw a continued disintegration of the rule of law and legal institutions. Camara instituted a practice of haranguing allegedly corrupt officials on television, although it was not clear whether this was aimed at rooting out corruption or taking control of it.

Under Conte, restrictive laws allowed media censorship and criminalized defamation, and private radio and print outlets were subject to suspensions and harassment. The state controls a radio station and the only television broadcaster. In 2009, the military junta sought to intimidate independent journalists through arbitrary arrest and other

tactics, and several were beaten, threatened, and harassed in the wake of the September massacre. Some foreign journalists were forbidden from entering the country during the year. Internet access is limited to urban areas, but has generally not been restricted by the government when available.

The Constitution, which provides for the protection of religious rights, was suspended after the 2008 coup. Religious rights are generally respected in practice, though there have been instances of discrimination against non-Muslims in government employment, as well as restrictions on Muslims' freedom to convert to other religions. Academic freedom has been hampered to some degree by government influence over hiring and curriculum content. Intimidation by the security forces eroded freedom of private discussion in 2009, particularly after the massacre.

The CNDD restricted freedoms of association and assembly, and the authorities clearly demonstrated their contempt for these rights during the brutal suppression of the September 2009 opposition rally. Even before the coup, the law allowed authorities to ban any gathering that "threatens national unity," and troops had repeatedly fired into crowds of protesters. The junta banned all political and union activity, though union and political party leaders continued to make public statements and met with the CNDD on several occasions in 2009. Moreover, a number of nongovernmental organizations operated openly, and trade unions engaged in strike actions, most notably after the massacre. In October, for example, a coalition of trade unions declared a widely observed two-day mourning period.

Under Conte, the nominally independent courts were marred by corruption, a lack of resources, nepotism, ethnic bias, and political interference. Informal customary justice mechanisms operated in addition to official courts. The legal system was thrown into turmoil by the CNDD's initial suspension of judicial institutions, and in June 2009 court staff went on strike to protest political interference in judicial affairs.

Security forces have long engaged in arbitrary arrests, torture of detainees, and extrajudicial execution with impunity. Prison conditions are harsh and sometimes life threatening. In 2008, international analysts warned that Guinea was becoming a significant transit point for drug trafficking.

While the law prohibits ethnic discrimination, human rights reports have noted societal discrimination in employment, housing, and marriage patterns. People from the Guerze ethnic group, to which Camara belongs, received favored treatment in 2009. Also, despite Camara's alleged anticorruption campaign, in 2009 the government signed a number of highly questionable and nontransparent contracts with foreign companies for exploitation of Guinea's minerals sector.

Societal discrimination against women is common, and while women have legal access to land, credit, and business, the inheritance laws and the traditional justice system have favored men. Security personnel openly raped dozens of women in the 2007 and 2009 crackdowns. Human Rights Watch has reported that thousands of young girls serving as unpaid domestic workers in Guinea are subject to beatings or rape by their employers. Guinea was a source, transit point, and destination for human trafficking in 2009, according to the U.S. State Department. Advocacy groups are working to eradicate the illegal but nearly ubiquitous practice of female genital mutilation.

**Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom.*

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