



Executive Summary

Report of the Assessment Team on Potential Violence Prevention Activities in Guinea

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Executive Summary

Guinea is in transition to a new government. Gen. Lansana Conté, who seized power in 1984 and transformed a military government to a centralized presidential regime with trappings of democracy 1989-1993, is seriously ill with diabetes and reportedly has fewer and fewer moments of lucidity. The bargain struck in February 2007, piloted by the trade unions, civil society and religious groups, for a cabinet government led by an independent reformist prime minister, Lansana Kouyaté, broke down in early 2008. The president and his entourage in fact never accepted the bargain and systematically obstructed the Kouyaté government. Public perception that Kouyaté was favoring his Malinké ethnic group and preparing his own ascension to power, presented the president, unhappy about a competing power center, with the opportunity to dismiss him.

In the absence of coherent presidential decision-making, the state has atrophied. The new prime minister, appointed in June, Ahmed Tidiane Souaré, has a limited writ and is viewed by much of the public as fatally compromised by earlier associations with Conté and as favoring the Fula. Although inflation has moderated over the past year, government coffers are empty. Different groups – the military the police, customs workers, health workers – have gone on strikes settled by promises of increased salaries – which are probably impossible for the state to fulfill. The army, gendarmerie and police are corrupt and frequently arbitrary in their behavior toward the citizenry. Governors, *prefets* and *sous-prefets* receive little guidance from the new Ministry of Territorial Administration and in certain regions of Guinea are dependent on local civil society to govern.

Sources of Conflict

There are multiple sources of conflict in Guinea:

1) Absence of the rule of law. The constitution (la Loi Fondamentale) and the major constitutional texts have not been respected. The courts do not function properly. Political influentials and large traders allied with the state manipulate the system to expand their fortunes. Citizens cannot expect justice from the courts, including in volatile disputes over land. The police lack vehicles and weapons and demand bribes for their services. Policemen commonly extort money from ordinary people, especially women. When a group of people considers itself outrageously wronged, it may attack and pillage symbols of the state, such as governors' offices, *prefets*' residences, or police stations. Such violence is spasmodic and local.

2) Ethnic distrust. Guinea is sharply divided among Susu, Fula (Peulhs), Malinké, and the ethnic groups of the Forest. The Fulas are generally considered to be the largest group and control most trade. (Some argue the Malinké with their various sub-groups are at least as numerous.) Malinké president Sékou Touré's inflammatory charge of a Fula conspiracy in the 1960s led to savage repression of some of the Fula elite and lingering bitterness. Susus have been advantaged by the Conté government and fear a return to power of the Malinké, who have periodically been the target of the president's wrath. Fula and Susu have clashed

in Conakry. Most political parties are ethnic in their orientation. Ethnic stereotypes are a fundamental fact of life in Guinea, but significant episodes of ethnic killings are uncommon. Under a situation of serious instability, however, clashes leading to ethnic cleansing could not be ruled out.

3) Violence by the security forces. Guinea's army, once considered patriotic and reasonably well disciplined, has fallen into disorganization since the mid-1990s. There have been several mutinies over pay and conditions. Following the last episode in May 2008, the state agreed to all demands for pay and benefits. Conflict between the military and police erupted into violence in June 2008, when army elements attacked a police camp, killing 20 or more policemen. The possibility of ethnic violence within the army can also not be excluded. Members of the military observe carefully patterns of promotion and command for signs of ethnic discrimination. A failure to pay military salaries could trigger new violence and possibly a more general uprisings aimed at seizing power.

4) Economic hardship and inequity. Guineans have not benefited from high international prices for bauxite, the major export. Senior government officials have skimmed off the revenue. The population has been buffeted by inflation, particularly in the price for rice, the most basic commodity. Full-time jobs are very scarce, and most Guineans in urban settings survive by living off the informal economy. Nevertheless, the economy is not prostrate. Urban markets are busy and harvests appear promising on top of a good rainy season. Economic inequity may be a more potent trigger, buttressing political inequity as a motive for spasmodic outbursts of violence.

5) External tensions. There are tensions along several borders. The most serious at present stems from the seizure by Guinean military elements of a strip of land in Sierra Leone on the far side of the Makona River boundary. The region is believed to have diamonds. Sierra Leonean citizens lack freedom of movement there. There have been clashes along the Malian border attributed alternatively to disputes over land or cattle rustling. Tensions along the Ivorian frontier related to civil conflict in that country have subsided during the past year, but might ignite again. (The demilitarized zone along the border that contained the Ivorian rebels no longer exists.) Insurgency in Senegal's Casamance region and political violence in Guinea-Bissau can impinge on the Guinean frontier.

6) Other: Unemployed youth, land disputes, drug trafficking. The educational system functions poorly and fails the youth. Full-time employment is unavailable both for those who are illiterate and those emerging from school at different levels, including university. Guinea's youth appear to have little hope for economic improvement and better governance and seek to leave the country. Youth are organized in various associations, but subject to ethnic manipulation by political parties. They can be incited to violence by parties or by payments from predatory elements associated with the state. Most of those armed in 2000 after the Liberian attack are still roaming the country. There is trans-generational discord in the neighborhoods of Conakry. Local conflict is generated by uneasy cohabitation between

herders and farmers and other land disputes, and, recently, drug trafficking is becoming a significant source of conflict.

Proximate Dangers of Violence

Although there are multiple possible sources of violence, the most likely dangers in the next six months come from three major sources. First, legislative elections, postponed from 2007 and scheduled for the end of the year, are certain to be further deferred. An independent national election commission (CENI) has been established. It has branches at the prefectural, sub-prefectural and the communal level. Biometric voter registration “kits” have been distributed throughout the country by CENI officials, and awareness outreach campaigns have been launched. Banners are visible in Conakry and some other urban centers announcing revision of electoral rolls. However, the state has not announced a specific date for elections, and the census required by the electoral code, which should have started months ago has yet to begin.

There is pervasive cynicism about the willingness of the state to hold elections. The president and his entourage have no interest in the formation of a new legislative body, which would challenge their authority. The National Assembly leadership and members are in no hurry to place themselves before voters who would probably replace many of them. The President of the National Assembly, the ailing Mohamed Aboubakar Somparé, clings to his position as constitutional successor to the presidency. The Minister of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs has no electoral experience and his ministerial team lacks the neutrality needed to run a free and fair election. He is reputed to be the president’s man and his collaboration with the CENI is sketchy. State representatives with whom the team met made a point of saying that the elections must be carefully prepared and that the financial means are lacking. The prime minister has not set a date. There are widespread expectations that the elections will be delayed into 2009. A delay beyond February 2009 is likely to lead to violence, according to a number of our interlocutors.

Second, the death of the president before elections would trigger the constitutional provision that the president of the National Assembly would assume the presidency for 90 days, during which national elections would be organized. There is an outside possibility, if the Speaker moved forward quickly and credibly with the electoral process, that the constitution would be respected. However, few among the political party representatives and other observers we spoke with believe that will happen. Most predict the army, or army elements, would intervene to seize power. That would likely generate demonstrations from the political parties and quite possibly extensive retaliatory violence against civilians, as different elements scramble for power.

Third, there is always the possibility that soaring prices of essential commodities, particularly rice, and a resurgence of widespread unrest could ignite a popular insurrection and demands that the president leave office, as in 2007.

Conflict Prevention Approach

The most urgent element of a conflict prevention strategy is support for fair elections. Although preparations have been launched, there are grave doubts that the CENI will be permitted to play its independent role. An approach supportive of free elections would require quick mobilization of outside resources to create the necessary partnerships and finance an intervention within the next 2-3 months.

A less urgent but more comprehensive approach would involve supporting Guinean civil society in forging and deepening a consensus about the mode of creation of a successor government, democratically elected and characterized by respect for human rights and the rule of law. The international community should assist Guinea by partnering with civil society promoting reform of state institutions, political parties and the security forces.

Factors Helping to Contain Violence

That Guinea has not fallen into civil war like Liberia and Sierra Leone suggests there are factors containing violence. There is a set of attitudes, a collective mental framework, restraining generalized violence: national pride about Guinea's leadership role in African decolonization and desire to preserve the nation, a desire to avoid the disastrous path followed by Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire and fear of the fragmenting consequences of ethnic violence. Institutionally, the most important peace promotion factor is the growth and proliferation of civil society. Over the past two decades donors, international NGOs and regional bodies have sponsored hundreds of training courses, workshops and other initiatives exposing Guineans to outside ideas about constitutionalism, human rights, the rule of law, and the responsibilities of citizenship. Moreover, recent crises have spurred the emergence to leadership of civil society groups at the national level. These include

- The National Council of Guinean Civil Society Organizations (CNOSCG)
- The trade union alliance (*Intercentrale syndicale*)
- The interethnic Committee of Elders (*Comité des Sages*)
- West African Network for Peace/Guinea (WANEP), linked to ECOWAS.
- The Guinean Organization for Human Rights (OGDH)
- The Mano Women's Peace Network (REFMAP in French), linked to the Mano River Union of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire
- The Center for International Trade and Development (CECIDE), the Civil-Military Committee's implementing partner
- Friends of the Future (*Les Amis du Futur*), a largely student group working in education and health

Certain state institutions are charged with reducing conflict and could play a constructive role:

- Ministry of National Reconciliation, Solidarity and Relations with the Institutions
- Independent National Electoral Commission
- And possibly the Economic & Social Council

And there are also mixed government-civil society organs of some promise such as

- The Civil Military Committee
- The Commission on the Struggle against the Proliferation and Use of Small Arms
- The Commission of Investigation into the Events of January/February 2007

Recommended Areas of Intervention

The team believes several conflict prevention initiatives with Guinean or sub-regional partners warrant the Steering Committee's consideration:

1. Support for a Social Forum, which would assist civil society, including the trade unions and Council of Elders, to mobilize rallies and meetings pressing for prompt implementation of the arrangements for free and fair elections. Potential partners: IFES, the CNOSCG, Search for Common Ground, WANEP
2. Financing a coordinator for a 90-day caravan of women's associations, drawing in different ethnic groups, traveling from the Forest Region to Conakry. Potential partners: NDI, WANEP/WIPNET, REFMAP and Guinean organizations such as AGUIFPEG, Club de Femmes, National Council of Women.
3. Training political parties on party platform building and non-violent campaigning, a bottom-up, participatory and consensus-building approach, focused on parties with representation in most of the country. Potential partners: IFES, Friedrich Ebert or Adenauer Foundation, Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA - Soros)
4. Mobilizing youth away from violence. The team does not propose a concrete project but offers some ideas for a future project.
5. Assistance to military families imbedded in local communities by training social workers to assist with family disputes and primary health issues. Potential partner: the Civil-Military Committee, CECIDE, and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)

Risks for Intervention

In the words of one of the team's interlocutors, "Guinea is sitting on a volcano." The volcano of violence could erupt at any time, ending any type of activity undertaken. There could be serious insecurity for any foreign personnel stationed in Guinea for BEFORE work, requiring evacuation on short notice, and a loss of money and time. There are also risks of inaction. Sustained political violence in Guinea would have destabilizing effects on all its neighbors, particularly Sierra Leone and Liberia.