

Çava?

The Newsletter of Friends of Guinea

Advocacy, Information, and Networking for Guinea and Peace Corps Guinea



15 Feb 2007 • No.20

Guinea Erupts in Protest

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It looks like it may finally be the end for Lansana Conté. Guinea's two major trade unions, the National Confederation of Guinean Workers (CNTG) and the Guinean Workers Union (USTG), called two joint national general strikes last year in protest of falling living standards and rampant government corruption, and ended them only when the government undertook to carry out specific reforms. The second strike, in June, was repressed violently, with thirteen killed. Against an atmosphere of widespread agreement that the government has failed to act on its promises, Conté shocked the nation in December by ordering his motorcade to the central prison in Conakry and personally releasing two of his longtime associates who had been arrested for embezzlement of government funds. Unions responded with anger, demanding the return of the two to prison. When Conté ignored them, they called an open-ended general strike for Wednesday, January 10.

Guinea was rated last year by Transparency International as the most corrupt country in Africa, and tied for second most corrupt in the world with Iraq and Burma, edged out of first place by Haiti. This time, the unions explicitly blamed the country's deteriorating economic situation on its political leadership and promised not to stand down until their demands were met.

The strike began peacefully, but an official ban on public meetings did not prevent Guineans from publicly demonstrating their opposition to the government. This led to confrontations between the police and residents of some parts of the capital, as well as several towns in the interior. By Monday, January 15, Reuters was reporting escalating tension in the country, with gangs of stone-throwing youths faced off against police armed with tear gas. Warning shots were fired, and the police arrested large numbers of demonstrators.

By Thursday, January 18, the situation had deteriorated further. Citizens in Conakry accused the police of entering private homes and arresting people at random, then demanding bribes for their release. The police denied this, saying that only looters and persons who had attacked the

police had been arrested. A Reuters dispatch on Thursday reported that police were patrolling the city with the muzzles of their weapons pointed out the windows of their vehicles. A correspondent interviewed a witness who had seen her neighbor shot at random as the police drove past. Also on Thursday, fresh riots and police repression were reported in Labé and Télémélé, with police in Labé killing one of the demonstrators. Talks between the government and the unions had made no progress, with USTG Secretary-General Ibrahima Fofana accusing the president of threatening to kill union leaders in the course of an acrimonious meeting the day before. Thursday also saw the extension of the strike to Guinea's mineral sector, with stoppages or slowdowns reported by the national bauxite company CBG in Sangaredi, the Russian-owned RUSAL refinery in Fria, and South Africa's AngloGold Ashanti Ltd, in Siguiri. By Tuesday, January 23, the reported death toll in the capital had risen to more than 30, although some figures were in dispute. Donka Hospital reported that they had received 33 bodies, and Thierno Maadjou Sow, president of the Guinean Human Rights League, told Reuters that more bodies were held in other hospitals. Witnesses reported that Ousmane Conté, the president's son and a captain in the notorious presidential guard known as the Red Berets, was leading operations against the strikers. Security forces prevented demonstrators from entering the city center by blocking the 30 November bridge, where they fired into the crowd. Reuters



Armored vehicle on a Conakry street. AFP photo

What is... ÇaVa?

ÇaVa is the quarterly newsletter of Friends of Guinea and seeks to maintain contact and community among members as well as inform them of the official activities of the organization.

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quoted a foreign diplomat as saying, "They were shooting at the demonstrators, not above their heads. They were kicking people who were wounded on the ground." Six people were also killed in demonstrations outside the capital.

By now the violence was beginning to be noticed outside of Guinea. The AU and the UN both criticized the government's use of force and called for negotiations, while positions had hardened on both sides. The unions now called "non-negotiable" their demand for a "consensus prime minister" who would be given broad powers to form a new government.

Jennifer Klein, an American working with the International Rescue Mission in Conakry, told of her emotions when she ventured out of the secure IRC

compound to join some of the demonstrators on the street: "It was worth the risk...tens of thousands of men, women and children, all marching to the city center to the presidential palace. I have been to quite a few protests before but none really hit me the way this one did...I had chills." In an email message Jennifer told how, "As they saw me standing off to the side of the road with my camera, people started pushing me toward the protesters in the street yelling at me to 'TAKE MORE PHOTOS!' My photos were pretty bad in the midst of the pushing and nerves, but for them, my camera was the way that they could get their story out... so I'm sharing this now."

Another email correspondent, a PCV, wrote of her sadness in being evacuated from Guinea. However, she said, "my tears are as much for joy as for sadness." She felt that she was witnessing "the beginning of a revolution," and said, "Today was a terrible and yet heroic day for the people of this nation." She drew a strong parallel between current events in Guinea and the civil rights struggle in the United States. "As many Black people gave their lives in order for us to enjoy the freedoms of equality today, many Guinean people have also given their lives in the midst of their struggle."

On Wednesday, January 24, the fifteenth day of the strike, Lansana Conté appeared to concede when it was reported that he had agreed to the unions' demands. Union leaders suspended their strike on Jan 29 after the president signed a document agreeing to their demands. Two weeks later, however, USTG General Secretary Ibrahima Fofana was telling IRIN that "Guinea is heading for another strike because nothing has been done by President Conté toward naming a new prime minister." On Tuesday, Feb. 7, he set the following Monday as a deadline for action.

Conté responded two days later, on Friday, Feb 9, with the nomination of Eugene Camara as Prime Minister. While the agreement signed by Conté required him to appoint a "consensus" prime minister who had never before held a ministerial position, Camara is a longtime ally of the president and currently minister of presidential affairs. The opposition was outraged. Even before union leaders could formally respond to Conté's announcement, riots broke out across Guinea. AFP reported that thousands of protesters in the town of Dinguiraye went on a rampage, burning two police stations, a gendarmerie post and the home of the police chief. Security forces attempted to control the crowds with tear gas but were overwhelmed by their sheer numbers, and eventually were forced to retreat to the Gendarmerie barracks for safety, while townspeople released all prisoners in police detention.



Civilians marching on the Presidential Palace. Photo by Jennifer Klein.



Conakry residents listening intently to the news. *AFP photo*

By Sunday it was reported that eight civilians had died in the renewed violence, including two youths beaten to death by the red berets when they threw rocks at the president's motorcade. In Kankan a soldier fired into a crowd of protesters, injuring several. He was then chased down and lynched by the crowd, who soaked him in gasoline and burned him.

Georg Cunz, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Guinea, has said the country's national health services are "in an appalling situation," and already unable to cope with the aftermath of January's protests without help from the outside, according to IRIN. Those protests resulted in at least 51 people dead and 1,400 injured across the country, according to the Guinean National Health Crisis Committee, while AFP puts the death toll at 59 and BBC at "about 60." The World Health Organization, the UN children's agency, the World Food Program, and the NGOs *Terre des Hommes* and *Mèdecins Sans Frontières* have all contributed to emergency relief after January's violence. OCHA, the UN humanitarian coordination agency, has already appealed for \$2.7 million in emergency funding in anticipation of more violent clashes to come.

As of Monday, Feb 12, reports consistently describe a deteriorating situation. Rumors are widespread that hundreds of ex-ULIMO fighters have arrived in Conakry to back Conté; others describe a detachment of soldiers from Guinea-Bissau sent for the same reason. BBC reports that at least nine people died in violent clashes on Monday. Three private radio closed by the Red Berets. Late Monday, Lansana Conté stations, *Liberty FM*, *Familia FM* and *Soleil FM*, have been closed by the Red Berets. Late Monday, Lansana Conté



Waiting in line to identify the bodies of relatives. *AFP photo*

Friends of Guinea

**Advocacy, Information, and Networking
for Guinea and Peace Corps Guinea**

Friends of Guinea is a non-profit organization made up of former and currently serving Guinea Peace Corps Volunteers, Guineans inside and outside of Guinea, and others interested in promoting the cause of Guinean development in the world at large. We are a country-of-service affiliate of the National Peace Corps Association. Dues are \$15 annually for individuals, and \$23 for families.

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declared a "state of siege," placing the nation under a 22-hour curfew and assigning police powers to the armed forces. No international flights have landed in Conakry since Saturday.

Protesters are on the streets around the country. In Gueckedou, BBC reports the police station has been sacked. In Labé, Guineenews reports that a home belonging to former prime minister Cellou Dalein Diallo has been sacked, as well as one belonging to former urbanism minister Alpha Ousmane Diallo. In N'Zérékoré, IRIN reports that protesters have looted houses and offices of local officials. In Kankan, protesters have battled police and broken open the city jail. In Conakry, protesters are reported to have looted arms from police stations over the weekend, and now are using them to battle riot police; and shots are reported to have come from inside the main army barracks, where soldiers are demanding pay and promotions.

Our correspondent Jen Peterson, still in Conakry, sent us the following message Saturday, February 10: "Things are pretty chaud here in Guinea today, and it is not harmattan. The President of Guinea appointed someone as prime minister last night who is not well appreciated by the population, and who doesn't meet the requirements established by the unions and agreed to by the president...so, we are back to strikes, riots, looting and burning of public buildings. Today is the worst day we have seen in terms of random pillaging and mass violence...private businesses have been broken into and looted, and all government ministers' homes, government buildings and party buildings are being targeted and burned."

At *ÇaVa?* press time, it is impossible to know what will happen next; whether the president will capitulate or be pushed aside, or whether renewed repression will put off his day of reckoning still further; whether the army will mutiny or stage a coup, whether the Ranger battalions in Kankan and

N'Zérékoré will get involved on the side of the government or of the protesters. It seems safe to say, however, that the country has crossed a bridge over which there is no return.

Peace Corps Evacuates Guinea

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Word started to leak out on Wednesday, January 24, when an AP article stated that the evacuation had begun. But it was not until the following Sunday that Peace Corps released a statement and made it official: All volunteers had been evacuated from Guinea.

G13 had already been cancelled due to the politically unstable situation in Guinea. Since before the strike began on January 10, serving Volunteers had been on "standfast," a rule requiring them to remain at their sites and radio Conakry twice a day to confirm that they were safe. After 13 civilians were killed in last June's strike, it must have been clear that another strike carried the strong possibility of further violence.

As the news from Guinea grew more ominous with each passing day, inquiries to Peace Corps were met with reassuring but general statements: "All Volunteers are safe and accounted for. Peace Corps is in daily contact with the Volunteers. Peace Corps is monitoring the situation very closely." However at some point the decision to withdraw the volunteers was made. On January 24 the AP quoted Mali Assistant Peace Corps Director Michael Simsik as saying the evacuation of "about 100" volunteers had already begun. According to him, the greatest concern was "that the strike could limit access to food or fuel supplies in the countryside."

It took four days before Peace Corps issued a statement on January 28, announcing that: "all volunteers serving in Guinea are safe and are consolidated in Mali. Volunteers were moved to Mali as a precautionary measure due to the on-going strikes and demonstrations in Guinea. The duration of the Guinea Volunteers' stay in Mali will be contingent upon the situation/events in Guinea."

Volunteers evacuated to Mali were given four weeks to decide whether to seek another Peace Corps assignment or to head on home. Many chose early termination. At this writing, some are certainly still mulling over their options. The Peace Corps office in Conakry is still open, but it is far too soon to say when, if ever, volunteers will be able to return to Guinea.

FOG Officer Elections

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Yes, it is time again to elect the officers who will keep Friends of Guinea a dynamic engine of support for PCVs, PCV families and friends, and RPCVs for another year. As events in Guinea run their unpredictable course, these few weeks will be crucial for the continuation or suspension of the Peace Corps program in Guinea. Whatever choices are made in Washington and Conakry, we at Friends of Guinea will strive

to keep our members connected to each other and to the small West African country we all love.

The six positions that make up FOG's Board of Officers are Advocacy, Communications, Finances, Membership, Projects, and Secretary. Anyone is free to run for any of these positions. You need not even be a member to run, although if elected, you will be required to become a member.

All FOG members will receive an e-mail ballot March 1, and will have until March 15 to return their ballot by email with their choices designated. If we don't have your email address, be sure to get it to us! Here is a description of the different officer positions, and statements from some folks who have already thrown their hats into the ring:

Advocacy: The advocacy director is responsible for coordinating broad goals which the group will be involved in. This may include assessing policy needs in Guinea through regular communication with FOG members, Peace Corps-Guinea, and NGO's in Guinea. Based on such an assessment, the advocacy director may develop and implement a yearly action plan for advocacy. From time to time an issue may arise which Friends of Guinea may want to support. The advocacy director can present such an issue to the FOG board and offer a recommendation for action, which the board may vote on. An example would be the decision of FOG to voice protest (via a public statement or editorial) on a USAID decision in Guinea. This position has currently been inactive, but is important to create a link to engage members who are interested in advocacy issues. Monthly time commitment: 3-5 hours.

Communication: We don't have a job description for Communication Director. However, we do have a statement from current Communication Director Brian Farenell (Beindou, Kissidougou '95-'97) on why he has decided to run again for his position: "My name is Brian Farenell and I am running for another year as communications director. I have been on Friends of Guinea's board since 2000, first as advocacy director and now in communications. I've also served as elections coordinator since 2001. Last March, I started an FOG blog, which provides news and other items of interest about Guinea, the Peace Corps and FOG. It also offered near daily updates during January's momentous general strike in Guinea. I hope to expand use of the blog in the future. If you have any ideas about how FOG can better communicate with or serve its members, I'd be enthusiastic to hear any suggestions."

Finances: The financial officer keeps track of the financial resources of FOG. He/she deposits monies from donations in an account under the name of FOG, and disburses monies as requested and approved by the FOG board. He/she also keeps financial records, via spreadsheet, of both expenditures and income, summarizing them for the board quarterly. On a monthly basis, the financial officer sends financial information to the membership director, to be used to verify new member payments. Monthly time commitment: 3-6 hours. Here is Shad Engilterra (Banko, '98-'00) on why he has volunteered to take this job over from our current financial officer, Jody Sites: "I was once told that I could rub two nickels together and come up with a quarter. While I suspect that the financial aspects of this position will be a bit less stressful than what I am faced with in my current 'real-life' job, it is important for us to be involved as much as possible for the benefit of Guinea."

"I know that my mom found our group to be a great source of support, and I would like to see us continue. I may not be able to do anything else for Guinea or PC at the moment, but I can do this."

Membership: This is a fun little role for someone who is detail-minded. The position involves keeping the members database, processing new memberships, sending out renewal reminders to current members and processing those renewals, processing NPCA rebates, writing a brief quarterly report and occasionally a piece for the newsletter, and fielding general questions from the membership. This is not a difficult, nor a very time-consuming position. On average, the job requires 15-30 minutes/week to perform small tasks (processing members, emailing, etc.). Then, once a month when the financial info comes in, 2 hours might be spent working with the database. Consider becoming an FOG officer and taking on this fun and satisfying position! Please direct any inquiries to membership@friendsofguinea.org. Monthly time commitment: 5-7 hours. Here's a word from Emily Ramshur (Koubia '00-'02), who has volunteered to continue in this position: "I have enjoyed the past year as your loyal Membership Director and would like the opportunity to serve you once again! Although life is a little hectic with grad school starting this year, "la nostalgie" sets in when I think of leaving my position. Thus, I hope you will VOTE FOR ME again this year to fill the role of Membership Director (even though I may be the only candidate, in which case I would STILL really appreciate your vote). ;) Jaraama buoi, nani!"

Projects: The Project Director (PD) is the liaison for matters concerning funding current or ongoing projects (mostly PCV-initiated) that are of interest to the FOG community. The annual Gender Conferences are an important project and a source of pride for FOG; each year, in close collaboration with PC/Guinea, we help raise significant amounts of money to ensure that these conferences can take place. The primary duty of the Projects Director is to correspond with volunteers, donors, Peace Corps, and FOG officers/members about project-related matters. The PD reviews and makes recommendations to the FOG board about new project proposals that s/he has received. Recommendations are based on the perceived quality, impact, and sustainability of the project. If necessary, the PD will coordinate votes among FOG officers about whether or not/how much to fund to provide. The PD also advertises projects via the newsletter, website and listserv to reach members and potential donors. Monthly commitment: 3-5 hours. Here's what current projects Director Claire Lea (Banian, Faranah '02-'04) thinks about taking this position back over: "I served as projects officer in 2005 and worked primarily on funding the Boys' and Girls' conferences that took place in December of that year. During 2006 I loosely worked with projects officer Dana. I am interested, this year, in setting up a partnership with an all-girl elementary school in Kankan run by a Guinean non-profit called A.P.R.O.F.I.G. and channeling donations from FOG members directly to this school for scholarships, books, etc. I firmly believe that FOG can continue to have a positive role in Guinea through grass-roots development projects even if the position of the Peace Corps program is unstable."

Secretary: The secretary's job is to keep track of FOG's records and just make sure that things happen as they should. This includes scheduling and running quarterly

teleconference meetings among the officers, and writing the minutes for those meetings. The secretary also asks other officers for quarterly reports every 3 months, and keeps a file of those. The secretary also maintains FOG's records, via spreadsheet, of important data such as monies donated to projects or key board decisions. When it's time to reaffiliate with the NPCA each year, the secretary pulls together those records. Basically, the secretary is the one who knows what's happening when, and reminds folks about it! S/he also answers general inquiries to FOG. The position takes about 1 hour/week, mostly spent answering emails, and perhaps another couple hours once a quarter for the quarterly meetings. Monthly commitment: 5-7 hours. A new person, Annie Kneedler, has stepped forward to take over this position (and we have to admit she sounds perfect): "I served as an Environmental Education volunteer in Tolo, Mamou from 2000-2002. I have been working in international development for the past 4 years, traveling back and forth to Africa consulting for USAID projects. I am finally going to be based state-side for the next few years, so I am eager to get involved with Friends of Guinea. As a self-described organizational nerd, I would enjoy serving FOG as Secretary to help organize and keep track of things."

Le Griot Nous Dit...

On February 11, **Woody Colahan** ('93-'96) and his family hosted a luncheon get-together for Denver-area RPCVs and other Guineafolk. **Marc Dysart** ('95-'97), **Jessica Klement** ('98-'00), **Lindsay Hannagan** ('04-'06) and significant others were joined by RPCV parent **Maggie Chasteen** and longtime Guinean staff member **Naby Soumah** with a generous sample of his ten-member family. Soussou-style eggplant sauce was served along with Fouta-style *maffé tigga*, and a wonderful time was had by all.

Rick and Becky Thyne (see article below) have sent us the following message: "Thank you for thinking of **Jesse** often. We do too, of course. And now we have a reason to smile. His sister gave birth to our first grandchild a year ago, and they named him after her brother. He's Jesse Milton Thyne Benitez, he's the love of our lives, and he's yet another way in which we remember Jesse."

A Message from Rick and Becky Thyne

Most of our readers know the story of the tragic death of Justin and Jesse. If you do not, there is a memorial webpage at Fallen Peace Corps Volunteers. The address is www.fpcv.org/jesse_thyne.htm.

Recent events in Guinea have overtaken the issue of the threatened cancellation of the Gender Conferences, which we reported in our last newsletter. With all volunteers evacuated from Guinea, they are of course now canceled. Readers may be interested to know however, that as a result of advocacy on their behalf by PCVs, RPCVs, and PC Guinea staff, Washington had granted permission for them to go ahead after all.

Our son Jesse Thyne and his Peace Corps Volunteer friend and colleague Justin Bhansali were killed in a highway accident near Pita nearly seven years ago, on January 7th, 2000. They were returning from a holiday in Ghana, each heading back to the kind of important work all of you are so deeply involved in. What prompts this note is the announcement about the gender conferences. Jesse was deeply committed to the women and girls of Diountou, the village an hour from Labe where he worked. After he died, several of our friends donated money to a fund in his memory, which we used in conjunction with the people of his village and Jesse's Guinean friend and patron, Mamodou Korka Diallo, to build a Center for Women and Girls in the village. We're pleased to know that all of you are still making such an heroic effort to draw attention to gender inequality and to lift up women and girls so that they share in the benefits of education and dignity to which all of you are so dedicated.

We send you our continuing gratitude for your bravery and diligence as you continue in "the hardest job you'll ever love," and we send you our warmest holiday greetings. (signed) *Becky and Rick Thyne*

Notes From Steph

Steph Chasteen, FOG's Sectretary, is also the brains behind Friends of Guinea's creation. She has always been there to lend an extra hand, pick up the slack, and inspire the rest of us to do the best job we can. It looks like she will be leaving us for a while, but true to form, she has a few ideas to share before she goes:

FOG in Second Life?

I'm thinking of having a little FOG reunion in Second Life, since we're all so far away in first life. At the least, I can make a FOG group in SL and we can meet at a club sometime and go dancing, nyah? If you're in SL, please email me your in-world name at info@friendsofguinea.org. (signed) *Stephanie aka DrSteph Scanlan*

Happy Birthday to us!

Hey, FOG just turned 8! Our website was launched in 1999 (though we didn't acquire friendsofguinea.org until 2001). Want to see how far we've come? Visit the Wayback Machine, which will give you glimpses of our website, back when it first toddled out on its wobbly little legs!

http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://friendsofguinea.org. And hey, in those 8 years we've given thousands of dollars to about a dozen small projects, and donated \$33,086 to the Gender Conferences (!). Yay us! Yay you!

You can see our history of accomplishments at <http://friendsofguinea.org/whathavewe.shtml>.

Steph-B-Gone?

It's true. After about 8 years of helping with FOG, I'm not going to be running for a position this year. I'll still be around as an informal advisor, but my new job has been taking too much time for me to attend properly to a full "officership." Thanks to everyone who's worked with me over the birth and growth of FOG, we've accomplished a great deal! I'm proud to have been a part of it.



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