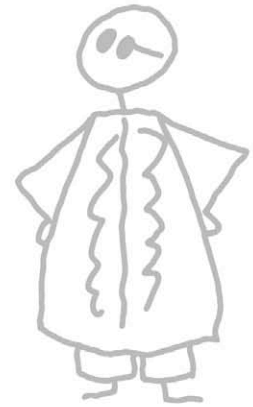


Çava?

The Newsletter of Friends of Guinea

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



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Guinea: Pausing on the Brink

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The last issue of *Çava?* was distributed at the height of a political crisis in Guinea. We reported on the events leading up to January and February's strikes and Peace Corps' decision to evacuate all Volunteers from the country.

The International Crisis Group said in a report released on February 14 that "the 12 February 2007 declaration of siege and establishment of a permanent curfew and martial law by President Lansana Conté after three days of renewed violence has brought Guinea to the verge of disaster." It seems that the country has paused on the brink and drawn back at least for now. Here is an update on events of the last few months.

As already reported, Lansana Conté's choice for Prime Minister, Eugene Camara, was violently rejected by the Guinean population before the unions could even voice their position. As union leaders met government representatives on Feb. 15 to explore ways out of the impasse, they "denounced abuses and the choice of the prime minister," according to union negotiator Aboubacar Biro Barry. It was reported the same day that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and African Union commission president Alpha Oumar Konare had both called on Conté to rein in the army, accused of killing over 110 unarmed civilians, and to respect the agreements reached in January with the unions.

Konare's letter to Conté, as reported by Reuters, read in part: "I strongly condemn the disproportionate use of force which caused the loss of many lives in Guinea," and "I request an inquiry be conducted to identify and bring to justice the authors of the killings."

Also on Feb. 15, the International Federation of Journalists called on Guinean authorities to "stop terrorizing the media" after a number of unprovoked attacks by security forces on radio stations.

Over the weekend of Feb. 17-18, the government arrested 300 members of the political opposition in operations across the country. On Feb. 19, authorities relaxed the curfew from 18 hours to 12 hours, in a gesture that may have been aimed at impressing an ECOWAS delegation that arrived that day. Union officials, however, refused to negotiate with the government until martial law was lifted completely.

The first break in the standoff came on Feb. 24, when the National Assembly delivered a stinging rebuke to President Conté by unanimously refusing to extend martial law beyond the initial period. Considering that the Assembly is almost entirely controlled by Conté's allies, the move was an astonishing victory for the opposition. Opposition leader Bâ Mamadou then called

PC Back to Guinea (Maybe)

With the stabilization of the political situation in Guinea, Peace Corps is making tentative plans for an early return to the country. Guinea country desk officer Jennifer Brown has informed Friends of Guinea that "the present plans are to return a small group of transfers and reinstates to Guinea in June and July." She notes that these plans are contingent on the preservation of an adequate "safety and security situation," but says that if conditions on the ground permit, a new group of trainees will arrive in the country in early December.

Çava? is glad to learn that Volunteers may soon be back to work helping Guineans improve their lives.

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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publicly for a “government of public salvation.” Two days later, Conté backed down over the choice of Camara and agreed to appoint a prime minister from a list of names submitted by the unions. Upon this announcement, the strike was suspended.

The man appointed by Conté was Lansana Kouyaté, the former executive director of ECOWAS. Kouyaté assured the press that Conté was not pressuring him or interfering with his freedom of action, although the unions warned later that “certain elements of society” were working actively to undermine his efforts. Their report specifically cited “the exit of huge sums of money, from the accounts of the army or the presidency, in violation of fiscal discipline.” By March 28 he was able to put in place a cabinet of technocrats and the political tension in the country declined markedly, although not completely. He immediately took emergency economic measures including the banning of food exports from the country, and early reports described a moderate decline in inflation and rates of exchange of the Guinean franc.

The U.S. government on March 30 “noted with satisfaction” Kouyaté’s intention to “focus on priorities such as an independent justice system, macroeconomic stability, political dialogue and good governance.”

However, Kouyaté’s challenges still include a significant degree of social and political unrest. He may in the long run find it difficult to put the genie of public

protest back into the bottle. On March 27 students in the Fouta town of Labé took to the streets to protest University conditions and a general lack of investment in higher education. One report numbered the demonstrators at three thousand. Several weeks later, on April 30, AFP reported that hundreds of street raders sacked and burned a police station in Kindia, after a merchant claimed that a group of fifteen armed police had invaded his home, tied him up, stolen money and precious stones, and raped his wife and daughter. Another student protest erupted at a mining college in Boké on May 23, when hundreds of students protested over the rank of the diplomas they were awarded.

The greatest threat to stability, however, raised its head on the night of May 2, when soldiers in Kindia and Conakry staged a pay protest, firing their weapons in the air and raiding stores of food and arms. The mutiny spread to Labé, Kankan and N’Zerekoré the next day, and continued sporadically. By May 10 it was reported to have spread to Gueckedou. Press accounts reported that soldiers were demanding salary arrears dating back to the time of the previous military mutiny of February 1996, when Conté promised to improve conditions for soldiers. Again, during the violent suppression of the recent national strike, Conté promised promotions in rank and pay grades to the army in return for their loyalty; however, these promises have apparently not been kept. In addition, according to London-based analyst Rolake Akinola (as reported in an interview with VOA), dissatisfaction in the army is also rife over ethnic favoritism. He says that when Conté first took power, he purged the army of non-Soussou senior officers. Many junior officers of Peuhl or Malinké ethnicity see their opportunity for advancement blocked.

EU Funds Released

A significant diplomatic, political and economic success was achieved at the end of an April trip by new Guinean Prime Minister Lansana Kouyaté to Paris, Strasbourg and Brussels to meet with officials of the European Union. EU Development and Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Louis Michel announced on April 25 “the immediate release of all funds and credits destined for Guinea, which have long been frozen. The financial situation in Conakry is now clear, since the nomination of Lansana Kouyaté as prime minister.”

Michel made it clear that EU confidence in Guinean governance rested heavily on Kouyaté’s personal credibility. The hopes of ordinary Guineans for progress would be even more difficult to realize without international assistance, so Kouyaté’s shoulders now bear an even heavier burden.

On May 11 soldiers upped the ante by rampaging through cities, including Kindia, Mamou and Macenta as well as Conakry. “We want the leaders who stole our wages and betrayed us to step down,” a soldier told an IRIN reporter on the scene. Later, the army protests began to abate after Conté agreed to meet soldiers about their grievances. The following day, national radio and television reported that the president had dismissed the minister of defense, Arafan Camara, and the Army chief of staff, Kelfala Camara, along with four other senior commanders. Protests resumed that night, however, as soldiers voiced their dissatisfaction with the choice of retired general Mamadou Bailo Diallo as new defense minister, and also after Conté failed to appear for the promised meeting. The meeting was postponed until Monday, Feb. 14, and then again until Tuesday, Feb. 15. In addition, the site of the meeting was changed from Camp Alpha Yaya Diallo, located in Conakry’s politically volatile suburbs, to the Samory Touré military base, located in the center of Conakry, said to be a Conté stronghold. Senior officers denied that security was a factor in moving the site of the meeting, and said that only “official business” had kept Conté from the Monday meeting.

Conté eventually met with the disaffected soldiers, but the results of the meeting were inconclusive. The government now may be backtracking on the promises made to the soldiers during the strikes: on May 18 IRIN reported that authorities say they may not be in a position to keep Conté’s commitments. The next day, May 19, defense minister Bailo Diallo went on national television to warn soldiers to return food, weapons and uniforms looted during the protests, or risk punishment. The protests are reported to have left 10 civilians dead, both from stray bullets and from attacks by marauding soldiers.

Meanwhile, the death toll from the suppression of the strikes in January and February has been set at 137 by Guinea’s new information minister, Justin Morel. This was even higher than the numbers given by international organizations such as Human Rights Watch, which had set the toll at 129. The National Assembly voted on May 20 to establish an independent commission to inquire into the deaths, although the Guinean Bar Association and the Guinean Organization for the Defense of Human Rights (OGDH) has already said they would refuse to participate in any government investigation. “This is about shining a light on all the crimes committed by the military and civilians,” said Justice Minister Paulette Kourouma.

An important political victory was achieved by Kouyaté on May 10, when he succeeded in convincing the major political parties that legislative elections scheduled for June should be postponed for six months due to the still-chaotic situation in the country. Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) leader Amadou

Oury Bah reported that “by mutual agreement, we decided to postpone the elections.” Kouyaté had argued that preparation for the elections had been stymied by the political upheaval in January and February; and that anti-government bitterness was still so strong that many local government officials such as governors and prefects had fled their posts in the interior and were afraid to return to their communities to carry out the administrative work necessary before elections could be held.

Another step taken by Kouyaté’s government has been to put into place a commission to review mineral exploitation contracts signed, as he put it, “in foggy conditions.” One of the first contracts challenged under the new screening process was a concession under which Texas-based Hyperdynamics Corp. was granted sweeping rights to explore for offshore oil in Guinean waters. Hyperdynamics is the company whose principal officers have set up an NGO with the name “American Friends of Guinea,” whose activities are apparently limited to the maintenance of a website. FOG’s inquiries to AFOG as to their goals and objectives have gone unanswered.

From May 24–27, Kouyaté hosted a government retreat in Boffa, to plan strategies that he hopes will allow Guinea to recover from its recent crises as well as long-standing structural problems. At the end of the retreat the government listed its priorities as peace, reconciliation, economic stability, jobs, basic services, and preparation for December’s elections.

While this was happening, the ruling PUP party of Lansana Conté named businessman Mamadou Sylla as its “honorary president” on May 26. Sylla is the Conté crony whose extra-legal release from prison (where he

Food Prices Moderate

One of the most difficult conditions under which Guineans have suffered in the last few years is the soaring inflation that has made it more and more difficult for average people to make ends meet. ÇaVa? has learned from informal sources that prices began to stabilize in Guinea soon after the installation of the new reform cabinet and the consequent suspension of the national strike.

A report posted to GuineeConakry.info in late April confirms that food prices in Conakry began to moderate soon after the deal struck in late February. On March 24, four days before Kouyaté’s cabinet was sworn in, correspondent Kadia Cissé reported that the price of the ubiquitous 50 kg bag of imported rice had fallen from 200,000 francs to 110,000. The price of a kilogram of beef was also reported to have fallen from 17,000 or 18,000 francs to 13,000.

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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was being held on corruption charges) at the president's orders sparked January's strikes in the first place.

Two days later, a group of thirteen small parties abandoned the ruling coalition to join the opposition National Alliance for a Democratic Alternative (ANAD).

By early June the situation inside Guinea seemed tense but calm, as Guineans waited to see if the new government would be able to change their lot. The military mutiny seems to be over, at least for now, and defense minister Bailo Diallo was touring barracks across the country, admonishing soldiers to behave "as if they were part of a republican army, and not bandits." Prime minister Kouyaté was in Washington DC to meet with officials of the World Bank and IMF, and to gather such support from the already-preoccupied American government as he could.

Human Rights Watch analyst for West Africa and Guinea RPCV Dustin Sharp sees rough waters ahead for Kouyaté. Interviewed by VOA, he observed: "The prime minister and his new government have many competing needs to stabilize and they have very little financial means to do it. And I think there is a real continuing risk that the military could play the role of spoiler in the progress we have seen so far this year."

Promo99: Guineans for Guinea

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We are pleased to tell our readers about a young NGO created by Guineans for Guineans. Promo99 (<http://www.promo99.org>) was created by a group of

about forty former students of Guinea's lycée Sainte Marie, all of whom graduated in 1999 – hence the name.

Many Guinea RPCVs remember El Hadj Tafsir Thiam, long a pillar of stability and savoir-faire in Peace Corps Conakry. His son Saikou Thiam is webmaster for the group, and contacted us about it to let us know it was getting off the ground. Saikou told us that: "most of us live in Europe, the U.S., and Canada. Many of us live in Guinea. We kept in touch all these years through a Yahoo! group and we try to meet once a year (for the ones in the U.S. anyway) at someone's place and enjoy each other's company (we have a cookout, play sports, and go out to have some fun). Last year it was at my place in Baltimore, MD.

"We decided that since we have been able to stay together this long, and most of us have a situation now (graduated from college, working, etc.), we can probably use this union to create something positive for our home country. That's how Promo99 began."

Promo99's first project has been in the area of education. Currently they are sponsoring a modest number of scholarships to their alma mater, the elite lycée Sainte-Marie. Soon they plan to help out public schools in the country by providing support such as books and computers.

Although it was founded by members of a single graduating class from Sainte-Marie, Promo99 "would welcome anyone who is interested. As a matter of fact, our next step is to make ourselves known out there so we can get more people involved." Saikou expresses the hope that Promo99 and Friends of Guinea will be effective partners for Guinean development. Such a collaboration can only be fruitful at a time when Guinea stands at a crossroads between progress and stagnation.

Visit <http://www.promo99.org> and see for yourself what this new group is all about.

Listserv Report

Urska Manners (Sigui, '00-'02)

Membership Officer

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Listserv by numbers:

- 406: members on the Guinea listserv
- 21: number of RPCV listservs
- 145: members on RPCV listservs
- 12: average number of members per RPCV listserv
- 20: members on rpcv01, the largest RPCV listserv
- 1: members on rpcv03 and rpcv04, the smallest RPCV listservs

Think that your stage can beat rpcv01? Miss old friends? Have a hankering to discuss Guinean politics? Need a good peanut sauce recipe? Join the Guinea or

RPCV listservs. Just email listserv@friendsofguinea.org with your starting year or go to the website to sign up.

Projects Report

Claire Lea (Banain, '02-'04)

Projects Officer

projects@friendsofguinea.com

We are open to all sorts of ideas on how to best help fund sustainable, grass-roots projects in Guinea. We will be putting together an application for funding shortly. Members, please send ideas my way!

Membership Report

Emily A. Ramshur (Koubia '00 - '02)

Membership Officer

membership@friendsofguinea.org

We currently have 133 members. This number is down from 6 months ago, at which time we had 166 members.

We have had a small influx of newly COSed volunteers and/or PCVs who had their service interrupted due to the recent violence in Guinea. I would love to see more RPCVs from this group join our ranks! If you are one of the five who just got home and joined FOG (you know who you are! Yes, you!), then I would like to encourage each of you to reach out to your groupmates and urge them to join, as well. The more the merrier! And, as always, FOG is a fantastic way to bridge the experience between Guinea and the US. Thank you to all of our new members, as well as those of you who have renewed.

If any members have suggestions as to how FOG might increase their member numbers, please feel free to write me at membership@friendsofguinea.org. I am always happy to hear from our members!

2008 Calendars Available

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The 2008 International Calendar produced by RPCVs of Madison, Wisconsin is now available. Purchase these excellent, high-quality wall calendars from Friends of Guinea for \$15 each (\$12 each for three or more) and your dollars will support FOG projects. These calendars make great gifts for moms, dads, teachers, work-mates, bosses, advisors, professors, committee members, your friend who wanted to join Peace Corps but never did (a little encouragement never hurt), and even your sympathetic neighbor – you know, the one who puts up with your

loud African music late at night. There are some amazing photos in it this year, too.

All proceeds go toward funding projects in Guinea. So get those orders in soon! Order over the internet (it's safe!) at www.friendsofguinea.org. Follow the link on the main page to purchase calendars. If you prefer, send a check by snail mail to me at Ellwood Colahan, 1636 S. Winona Ct., Denver, CO 80219. Don't forget to include your address! I'll send you your calendars promptly.

Free personal Classifieds in CaVa?!

All members in good standing of Friends of Guinea are entitled to one free personal advertisement per year in *CaVa?*, the quarterly newsletter of Friends of Guinea. These advertisements are limited to 21 words and are intended primarily as a way for families and friends to send messages of support and encouragement to volunteers serving in Guinea, although they might equally be used to broadcast other messages. Take advantage of this free service by emailing your message of 21 words or less to the Newsletter Editor at newsletter@friendsofguinea.org. Please note that this service is available only to current members of Friends of Guinea, so please submit your advertisement under the name in which your membership is listed so that we may verify your status.

Email Newsletter Available

If you prefer not to have this paper version of *CaVa?* cluttering up your mailbox, or if you don't want your membership in Friends of Guinea to promote deforestation, or if you just want to save us the price of a stamp, you may elect to receive this newsletter by email. The email version is formatted in HTML, and includes a link to a .pdf version of the paper newsletter that is posted on the Web and contains all the formatting of the original. Or you can receive both the paper and electronic version, and have the best of both worlds. Email membership@friendsofguinea.org and let us know of your preference, and we'll make a note of it.

Le Griot Nous Dit...

Jennifer Williams ('93-'95) says: "I met up with **Jon and Denise Goldin-Dubois** ('94-'96) here in Boston last month as Denise was to run her first Boston Marathon. I met them with their children Olivia and Jonah in the North End where we had a very Sopranos-like dinner, and then she ran and completed the marathon the next day. Go to the web site for her time and placement. But this is a kudos out to Denise. Congrats and great to see you!"

ÇaVa?

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