

# Çava?

**The Newsletter of Friends of Guinea**

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



15 Dec. 2007 • No.22

## Guinea: Change on Hold

In early November the International Crisis Group issued a new report on the situation in Guinea, painting a picture of a country that, after sacrificing much for political change, seems still to be stuck in grinding poverty and political paralysis. The report, entitled “Guinea: Change on Hold,” places blame for political and economic stalemate in Guinea firmly in the hands of the country’s autocratic and discredited ruler, President Lansana Conté.

The report is available (for free from the group’s website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)) only in French, but here is a condensed version of an executive overview published in English:

“Ten months after an unprecedented popular revolt shook the 23-year regime of President Lansana Conté and more than a half year after a new government was formed, Guinea’s stability is as fragile as ever. The honeymoon of Prime Minister Lansana Kouyaté, the ex-diplomat entrusted with producing ‘change,’ is over. The movement that brought him to office is deeply fragmented, creating opportunities for Conté and his clan to regain control. To prevent more bloodshed and counter-revolution, Kouyaté urgently needs to demonstrate that he means to work for a democratic and peaceful transition, and he needs help, especially from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), donors and the two states, the U.S. and France, with ties to the unreformed army.

“The protestors in the streets in January and February 2007 (between 137 and 183 died; over 1,500 were wounded) demanded radical change and felt they had won a significant victory when Conté agreed to name an independent prime minister, who would pick his own government. But the mood today is grim. Although inflation has slowed, initial enthusiasm has been replaced with doubt over the capabilities and will of the new government to break with the Conté system and alleviate daily economic difficulties.

“It is premature to judge Kouyaté a failure but he has

yet to send strong signals that his way of governing is a real break with the past. The Conté clan and its supporters have not accepted their defeat and are maneuvering to regain full power, not least by playing on popular disappointments to provoke divisions between the actors in the ‘February revolution’: trade unions, civil society organizations and opposition parties. It is Conté, however, who remains the prime obstacle to improvement in the lives of Guineans. The agreement that ended the February crisis left him as the constitutional leader; he must sign all decrees and can and does easily stall government action. Kouyaté’s office does not exist in the constitution, and he has only the powers the president delegates.

“Free, fair and transparent legislative elections are needed within the next six months to begin the true process of dismantling the Conté system by democratic means. In the meantime, however, Kouyaté, democratic forces and the international community need to take a number of steps in order to revive the dynamic of change.... Without such measures, Guinea’s crisis is likely to return, quite possibly in the form of less orderly demonstrations than early in the year, which could easily tip the country back into violence and set the stage for restoration of the discredited Conté regime or a coup.”

## Malaria Vaccine Found Safe and Effective in Infants

Dr. Pedro Alonso of the University of Barcelona and a team of researchers reported in the November 3 issue of the British medical journal *Lancet* that a clinical trial of a new malaria vaccine in Mozambican infants showed it to be safe and to significantly reduce incidence of malaria infection. It provided a 65 percent reduction in new cases over a three-month period, surprising some scientists.

Malaria kills more than a million people every year,

or approximately one every 30 seconds. Most of its victims are infants and young children in sub-Saharan Africa.

“This is a very major breakthrough,” said Dr. Alonso in a conference call with reporters to publicize the results of the study, according to a copyright article by Reuters news agency. “These tantalizing and unprecedented results further strengthen the vision that a vaccine may contribute to the reduction of the intolerable burden of disease and death caused by malaria.” Plans are underway for a large-scale “phase III” trial in 2008, involving 16,000 infants and children in seven different African nations. If the phase III trial goes well, the vaccine could be submitted for regulatory approval in 2011 and be commercially available in 2012, according to Reuters.

The vaccine, developed by GlaxoSmithKline, is known as RTS,S/AS02 or Mosquirix and is administered in three doses. Glaxo has invested \$300 million in developing the vaccine and could spend as much as \$100 million more before it becomes commercially available. Some costs have also been borne by a grant of more than \$100 million by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to the nonprofit PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative. Glaxo says it will sell the vaccine at affordable prices to multilateral institutions so they can make it available in developing countries.

## Projects Report

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This quarter has been productive for FOG. It's exciting to announce that we've donated money to two important projects that will directly improve conditions and education in Guinea.

The first of these is a water pump project in Upper Guinea that will provide clean and safe drinking water to Kansan, a district village of 1650 people. The PCV working with this project, Kimberly Mason, tells us: “Diarrhea, dysentery, worm/parasites, and skin rashes are rampant in Kansan. This is primarily due to the lack of potable water. Currently, during the five-month dry season, the women must walk three to four kilometers to collect stream water for drinking. This water is not only contaminated with microbes, but it also contains visible debris. During the rainy season, the women access water in their traditional wells. Although this water is cleaner than that of which is found in the streams, lizards and other animals live in these wells. This animal contamination is a major cause of diarrhea and dysentery. The village is situated approximately 200 kilometers from any large city on a terrible road. This likely explains why their need for potable water has

# Friends of Guinea

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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.

**email:** [info@friendsofguinea.org](mailto:info@friendsofguinea.org)

**website:** <http://friendsofguinea.org>

gone unrecognized.”

This is a relatively large project, money-wise. Drilling wells in Guinea is a very expensive business. The total requested by the volunteer for two pump wells was a little over \$22,000. Almost half that amount has been raised, including FOG's contribution of \$3,000, but several thousand dollars are still needed before the project can get underway. Please support the PCV by making a donation. Go to [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov), click on *Donate Now*, then on *Donate to Volunteer Projects*, then select *Africa*, and scroll down to *Guinea*. You will find Kimberly Mason's project, along with perhaps one or two others. If you are interested in more information, reading the proposal, or fundraising for it, please contact me at [projects@friendsofguinea.org](mailto:projects@friendsofguinea.org). We believe this is an important project for health in Guinea.

The second donation we made this quarter was to *Partage Québec-Guinée* (PQG), the Canadian NGO that sends shipments of books to Guinea. Our donation of \$2,600 paid for the shipment of one 53-foot container of about 15,000 books from Quebec to Delaware, where Alcoa puts it on one of its boats, ships it to Guinea for free and stores it for free in Kamsar until the books can be distributed by PQG's local partner.

After receiving our donation, Robert Dykes wrote us in thanks: “This shipment will come very close to that symbolic container which allows us to say we have, during the first decade of our efforts, provided books to every village with a school in every sous-préfecture of Guinea! I am glad that you can share the pride of that

# 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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symbolic moment with us. I thank you very sincerely for your contribution and I ask that you extend the appreciation of the staff and volunteers of Partage Québec-Guinée to all of the members of FOG who have helped Guinea in person the past and who now continue to help indirectly in these efforts to support the efforts of Guineans help themselves.”

Now, you may be thinking at this point that FOG certainly has a lot of money to play with. Where did it come from? Well, it comes from membership dues, calendar sales, and small amounts come from sources like using the Amazon.com link on our webpage.

Most of the money we've raised over the past three years from our membership has been primarily for Gender Conferences that give young men and women in Guinea the chance to attend a leadership conference in their regional capital. Some of the money we raised for the most recent conference was actually refunded to us. Because of high and rapid inflation rates, the budget requested in Guinean francs was met with fewer US dollars. In the case of the 2006–2007 conference, it was cancelled when Peace Corps evacuated Guinea. We had raised the money, which was returned when the project was cancelled.

We do have a bit of money still earmarked for the next conference, whose date is uncertain since PCVs have only recently re-arrived in Guinea. According to an APCD in country, they are tentatively scheduled to take place in mid-to-late 2008 if a Volunteer decides to take on the project. We'll keep you posted on that if and when it takes place.

Anyone who is a “Friend of Guinea” may have an idea or a contact person for a project that will improve lives in Guinea. I hope that a few of you in our membership will come forward with some proactive ideas to make FOG a more active group in Guinea.

## Advocacy Report

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Peace Corps week is coming! The week at the end of February/beginning of March is celebrated each year as a time to work towards Peace Corp's third goal: “to strengthen Americans' understanding of the world and its people.” So, what can you do? Start planning a presentation now. Find a school, community, religious, or service group that would be interested in a small presentation on your time in Guinea. Speak with your co-workers about life in West Africa. It doesn't have to be a large undertaking, and [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov) has ideas and resources under “Resources for Returned Volunteers: Peace Corps Week,” including a prepared PowerPoint presentation on Peace Corps. If you register on-line, you will receive stickers and bookmarks for all participants as well as a written guide and map.

As a teacher, I have 120 students every day who are my captive audience. Once a year, I am lucky enough to forget about middle school math and spend a day remembering life *au village*. Students appreciate music and objects from Guinea (cloth, wooden spoons, calabashes, etc) and have lots of questions about any photos I show. In fact, I usually just think of a few stories I want to tell (like “the time I saw the boa constrictor”) that, along with a general checklist of things to mention, easily takes me through 45 minutes.

On a larger scale, last year I took all of my students and team teachers to see *Les Ballets Africains* at a local theatre, and this year I am running a full-school assembly with Guinean drummers and dancers who will then stay for two days of gym classes to work with all students in the school. With another teacher, we are coordinating to bring small messages every day for a

## World Wise Schools

If you are a teacher or know of an enthusiastic person in an educational organization, the Coverdell World Wise Schools program at the Peace Corps offers a unique opportunity to connect with a currently serving PCV. The Correspondence Match program is a vibrant two-year exchange of ideas, stories, pictures, and artifacts that helps U.S. students in the classroom learn about the people, geography, environment, and culture of the world from the direct experience of Volunteers living in other countries. Whatever the grade level, area of expertise, or geographic preference of the U.S. educator, there is a Peace Corps Volunteer who is ready to communicate with your students. To enroll, please visit [www.peacecorps.gov/wws/correspond](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/correspond).



week to students about Guinea and Peace Corps via the school announcements. In the past, I've given talks to school groups at three different schools, a group of teachers at a private school, and a local chapter of the Rotary. There are lots of things to do to publicize Peace Corps and the good work you've done. So get out there!

One other thing: As a new member to the Friends of Guinea board, I am currently trying to determine what exactly our Advocacy Director should be advocating for. What are issues that RPCVs from Guinea can be united on? Are there any issues that you think should be addressed by our organization? If so, please let me know at [advocacy@friendsofguinea.org](mailto:advocacy@friendsofguinea.org).

## Le Griot Nous Dit...

**Marc Dysart** ('94-'96) was married on November 10 to Stephanie Iwanski in Breckenridge, Colorado. **Jon and Denise Goldin-DuBois** ('94-'96) attended with their two children, as did **Woody Colahan** ('93-'96) and his family. At the reception Marc triumphantly led the band on solo trumpet.

**Jon and Denise** have moved back to Denver from Washington, DC. After ten years with Common Cause, including his stint in DC as Executive Vice-President, Jon has started a consulting business to help environmental groups and other non-profit organizations to influence public policy.

**Claire Lea** reports that last August, **Josie Brenton** was married in Franklin, Maine, with several members of G2 and G4 in attendance.

**Emily Ramshur** tells us that in May, **Julia Watkins** (G-0, Wassaya) married Scott Stone, a Washington, DC environmental policy attorney. "The ceremony was up on a grassy hill in the mountains around Asheville, NC and the reception was a blue-grass, foot-stomping, upscale barn party." The couple lives in DC.

In September, **Matthew Edwardson** (G0, Dialokoro) and **Justina French** (G0, Telimele) were married in a sunny outdoor wedding in the vineyards of Virginia. They also live in DC.



*Jenni Pearson, Jesse Fleicher, and Leslie (Spoelstra) Friday gather for the wedding of Josie Brenton in August.*

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