

Çava?



The Newsletter of Friends of Guinea

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

15 November 2009 • No.32

FOG statement on the events of Sept. 28

This statement was put together by Brian Farenell, RPCV and current Communications Director for FOG, and approved by current officers and members-at-large.

As an organization primarily consisting of people who've lived in or have some other strong connection to the country, Friends of Guinea is following the unfolding events in the Republic of Guinea with grave concern. We condemn the massacre of 187 peaceful, unarmed protesters (over 1000 were injured) by the Guinean security forces and are particularly horrified by reports of soldiers publicly raping women.

The country's military leader, Capt. Moussa Dadis Camara, claims he has no control over the elements within the army and even blamed civilian opposition politicians for leading their followers into a confrontation with that army. In reality, the tension has been caused by Guineans' rightful disgust with corrupt leaders who've misruled and oppressed them with complete impunity for decades, [this] slaughter being only the bloodiest example.

Guineans were initially optimistic about the new regime, as Capt. Dadis promised to crack down on corruption and drug trafficking. He also promised not to stand in next January's presidential elections. It was his reneging on that promise that led to the escalation of tension in the country. The brutal suppression, by men in uniform acting in his name, of peaceful protests is only making things worse.

If we are to take him at his word, that he's not in control of the military, then the military ruler must make re-establishing that control his number one task, not running a political campaign. We are heartened that Capt. Dadis says he agrees that an international inquiry into the massacre is merited, but that is not enough. We call on him to keep his initial promise to not run in the upcoming presidential elections and to hand over power to a democratically-elected civilian government. Imposing control over the security forces, implementing the rule of law and establishing democracy would be

three of the most important things he could do for Guineans.

The September 28th killings occurred on the 51st anniversary of Guinea's historic rejection of French colonialism. In the lead up to that vote, Guinean leader Sékou Touré said that his countrymen would choose "poverty in liberty over prosperity in slavery." Guineans have seen plenty of poverty but precious little liberty. They are clearly showing how fed up they are with corrupt, autocratic regimes. After half a century, it's long past time they are allowed a leader who reflects their will. We call on Capt. Dadis to allow that to happen.

-Friends of Guinea Board of Directors

Follow FOG on Twitter

Brian Farenell, FOG Communications Director

You can now follow Friends of Guinea via Twitter. Just follow go to twitter.com/friendsofguinea and follow us. In addition to linking to our blog entries on FOG, Peace Corps and Guinean news, I will also repost ("retweet" or RT) links to related stories from other news outlets. It's a good way to keep up to date, especially now as events seem to be unfolding quickly.

FOG Needs a Secretary!

FOG is currently working without an active secretary. The time commitment is estimated at 5 to 7 hours per month, and a complete list of duties can be found at:

<http://www.friendsofguinea.org/aboutfog/officerduties.shtml>

If you are interested in volunteering your time to help FOG run, please contact us at info@friendsofguinea.org.



Editorial: What next for FOG?

Mackenzie Dabo, FOG newsletter editor

Since the events of September 28, Guinea has been in the news like never before. While things in country have returned to a type of normality since the atrocities of that day (e.g. school has opened and life continues), the international community has been shocked beyond belief and most international community members have left Guinea in protest over the current government and in fear of what may happen.

Peace Corps officially suspended the Guinea program on October 20, leaving 100+ volunteers and staff from PC Guinea trying to find the next step in their journey. The same can be said of FOG as an organization. On Sunday, November 8, many FOG officers and members at large attended a conference call about its next steps. All parties involved agreed FOG is still a relevant organization, and committed to the three applicable (of four) FOG objectives as stated in the organization's mission. The mission is to:

1. Connect current and former United States Peace Corps volunteers serving in Guinea and their families and friends with other people dedicated to helping Guineans,
2. Support both current Peace Corps volunteers in Guinea and their families as they experience the difficulty of extended separation,
3. Work towards the long-term development of Guinea by supporting and initiating worthy projects, and
4. Disseminate cultural information about Guinea, its people, and their customs in order to facilitate intercultural understanding.

If you are in agreement that our mission is relevant, please consider encouraging your family and friends to become a member of Friends of Guinea.

FOG is also hoping to partner with Alliance Guinea, an organization that has sprung up organically since the events of September 28. Under the direction of many RPCVs and Guinean Nationals, this group has started some exciting work. FOG hopes to use our extensive reach to connect others interested in these causes. Please see the article on the following page.

FOG looks forward to soon being able to advocate for a return of Peace Corps in Guinea. In the past year, Peace Corps has returned to Liberia and has also just announced (11/2/09) it will return to Sierra Leone.

Through all of this, let's not forget what is most important: the safety and best interest of the people of Guinea, including all of the families who have taken in volunteers as one of their own. We are all thinking of them and sending our thoughts, prayers, and best wishes.

Message from Friends of Sierra Leone

I wanted to send FOG a message from Friends of Sierra Leone. We understand what you are going through at this difficult time and will be hoping and praying for a quick and peaceful end to the problems in Guinea at this time. FoSL members know too well the heartbreak and anxieties when a country and her citizens that are loved are in a state of violence and unrest. During my Peace Corps days someone told me how personal a distant war becomes when you have walked the streets of the places named on the nightly news and when you have friends who still live there. How true that is. Hang in there.

-Peggy Murrah, President, Friends of Sierra Leone

What is...

CaVa?

Ca Va 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. We welcome submissions!



Edited by: Mackenzie Dabo
Email: newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

Who are we?

FOG is run by a small group of volunteers.
Consider joining our ranks!

Friends of 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.

email: info@friendsofguinea.org
website: <http://friendsofguinea.org>



Visit us on Peace Corps Connect
<http://tinyurl.com/pcguinea>

Alliance Guinea: Coming Together for Justice and Democracy

Jennifer Swift-Morgan, PCV '99-'01

The day after September 28, when the Guinean military brutally killed, raped and severely wounded pro-democracy protestors in the stadium and streets of Conakry, we (I along with some friends) knew we had to do something. We had seen other episodes of violence in Guinea in recent years but this time felt immediately different. There was the fact that Guineans finally seemed more or less united – for the first time in history – that the military leader in power had to go. That military rule *in general* had to go; 51 years was enough. Then there was the sheer number of kids – and most were kids, or *jeunes*, in any case – killed and wounded, and the way that they were trapped like animals in the stadium (that stadium – how many times had we all driven or walked by that stadium?) and gunned down and stabbed from behind. Then there were the rapes. When we first heard the reports many of us could not even get our heads around it. Rapes in Conakry? In the streets? Dozens of women – and with rifles and worse?

How many times throughout the years had we asked ourselves, “When are the Guinean people finally going to reach a breaking point, the moment when they will say enough is enough?” It seems that September 28 (again) was that moment. A tragedy had occurred, but also an act of immense courage by people who were willing to die for freedom and the chance of a better life after half a century of oppression. And when I sent a simple email out to the FOG listserv and some other friends and family saying “I feel like we should do something, does anyone want to help?”, I was flooded with responses. We weren’t even sure what that something was. But we created a Facebook group and within days had hundreds of members from around the world, many of whom were writing letters to their hometown newspapers and representatives in government to get the story out and make sure that Guinea would finally get the attention it needs.

The mission of the group, now named Alliance Guinea, is to connect “friends of Guinea” of all kinds (RPCVs and their families, musicians and dancers, researchers, NGO & aid agency staffers with ties to Guinea and others who simply want to show solidarity with the mission of justice and democracy) together, and, along with Guineans from the Diaspora in the U.S. and Europe, to keep each other informed and to take concrete, concerted action “to promote human rights and a peaceful, democratic transition to civilian rule in Guinea.” Modeled somewhat after MoveOn.org and similar groups, the idea is not to create a formal NGO but rather a “worldwide, nonpartisan forum for friends of Guinea of all nationalities and ethnicities to share information and resources and create powerful synergies for advocacy and action.” Making the most of social networking and web technologies, we are aiming to help coordinate and facilitate the entrepreneurial actions of

Alliance members – and anyone who shares our mission can be a member.

Specifically, early conversations between some of us mobilizing around the issue led to the laying out of four main areas where we thought the group could be helpful, and what we have started to do:

1. Advocate to governments, international organizations and agenda setters in support of human rights and a peaceful, democratic transition in Guinea (e.g. through letters, meetings, and marches);
2. Serve as a resource to human rights organizations, law clinics, and international agencies investigating human rights abuses in Guinea (e.g. by sharing useful contacts and providing Guinea-specific knowledge);
3. Serve as a resource and nonpartisan, multiethnic forum for activists, journalists and victims of human rights abuses in Guinea (e.g. through our website and events);
4. Conduct outreach and provide resources for educators and student groups to raise awareness and promote activism in support of human rights and democracy in Guinea (e.g. again through our website and events, as well as listservs and other channels).



L to R: At DC march, Alimou Bah (former PC driver); Kimberly Fowler, (Labe, '02-'03); Jessamyn Miller (Labe, '02-'04); Elise Reuschenberg (Dalein, '02-'04); and Dana Wiggins (Sannou, '02-'04). Photo courtesy J. Miller.

In the past several weeks we have had a number of exciting activities and some early successes. A meeting of a group of Alliance members (American and Guinean) with Congresswoman Yvette Clarke of New York led to the Representative making a statement on the floor of the House calling for continued US engagement to support a transition to democratic civilian rule in Guinea and for increased humanitarian aid. Working with the Movement of Guinean Women in the United States and the Guinean “*Forces Vives*” coalition of civil society activists and opposition supporters in the US, we helped get people to the march in Washington on October 26 and co-wrote a memo delivered that day in meetings with the State Department and with Congressional Foreign Affairs and Relations Committee staffers. Shortly after, the US announced it was instating travel sanctions against the CNDD junta and its associates – and while maybe we cannot claim credit, the State Department is well aware of the *Force Vives* and Alliance Guinea constituencies and has welcomed

ongoing dialogue with us. Thanks to contacts of eye-witnesses and others passed along to Human Rights Watch, we contributed to the NGO's hard-hitting report on the September 28 atrocities, and continue to make our members available as informants. Finally, events held at campuses such as Pomona College, UCLA and Columbia University and marches in Lille and Paris organized by Alliance members and partners have helped raise awareness and get more people involved.

At this stage, we are in the process of creating a proper coordinating committee for Alliance Guinea and are still looking for people both for this and for subcommittees (such as campus mobilization, communications, educators, and US-based advocacy). Please let us know of your interest or other ideas by emailing allianceguinea@gmail.com. We also encourage everyone to join our Facebook group and read and contribute comments to our webpage, www.allianceguinea.org, which we maintain in English and in French especially to facilitate exchange between people in Guinea and non-French speakers.

As our friend Mike McGovern (RPCV, Guinea expert) has pointed out: the CNDD did more on September 28, 2009, to unite the Guinean people against its rulers than anything ever had before. Atrocious

crimes were committed and justice must be served – but we also find ourselves with a historic window of opportunity to join forces with our Guinean friends and family and maybe, just maybe, help to avoid greater violence and usher

Guinea into a new era of democracy and prosperity.



March in DC 10/26/09. Photo courtesy Jessamyn Miller.

Thousands in Washington call for justice

Excerpts from: Alliance Guinea (reposted with permission)

With a huge showing of women in the lead, an estimated 5,000 people from at least 11 states – Guineans and friends of Guinea – marched in front of the White House and to the US State Department today (Monday, October 26) to increase awareness of the atrocities of September 28 and to demand justice for the victims and help for a transition to democratic elections in Guinea....In addition to people residing in Washington DC, marchers came in from Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Ohio, Indiana, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland, with 17 buses from New York alone to show unity and solidarity for the people of Guinea and demand that action be taken now in the name of human rights and democracy.

JADE Project in Kankan

Nick Davis, Mali-Yembering and Kankan, '03-'06

FOG recently helped RPCV Nick Davis transfer \$1,500 that he was awarded from his college to **Jeunesse Action Développement (JADE)**, an NGO based in Kankan. Nick explains a bit about the program and his involvement below.

I was a PCV in Guinea from 2003-2006. I was initially an education volunteer in the Fouta (Mali-Yembering) but extended my contract to work with JADE for a year in Kankan. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I was ironically the only paid member of the organization, composed of graduates and students at the University of Kankan passionate about youth-oriented community programs. I was brought on primarily to help them realize their most ambitious project to date: the creation of a socio-educational center for Kankan's growing population of street kids. This was a population of children as young as ten or eleven who for one reason or another had left their families in the village and come to the city to try to earn a living. Almost invariably, they wound up homeless, sleeping in the markets and taxi-parks by night and performing back-breaking labor by day. Our plan was to create a center where they could find food, shelter, security, guidance, and education (traditional & vocational), with the ultimate goal of eventually reuniting them with their families. The project didn't receive any official funding until after my departure, but we all pulled our weight to do what we could for the 20 or so children the organization had already identified and brought under its wing.

In addition, JADE has implicated itself in other youth-oriented projects, from child trafficking initiatives to the organization of computer-training seminars for local high-school students.

As for the \$1500, it was the proceeds of an annual award given out by my alma mater (Saint John's University in MN) for demonstrating a "commitment to social change and social justice." (See more at:

<http://www.csbsju.edu/csbcampusministry/caritas/>)

Thanks to everyone at FOG who helped out with the transfer!

Ed.note: A report submitted by JADE (in French) lays out what they used the award monies for. They purchased a motorbike to be used in general transport and to rapidly get help to any minor in danger with the law (in 2008-09, they aided ten minors involved with legal issues and a total of 35 children). The annual rent on their center was paid. Also, a sketch of a former street child, Bakary Keita, was commissioned. Mr. Keita is now a well-known artist in Kankan and is a symbol of the transition from street life to community life. The balance of the funds was saved in the organization's bank account for future use.



Girls Rock! Fouta Girls Conference

Katy Murtaugh, Dalaba, '07-'09

On August 30th, the 11th annual Girls' Conference for the Fouta Djallon came to a close with Guinean girls and American volunteers alike letting their hair down and dancing their hearts out. We'd spent four days together, talking about issues that affect girls today (like HIV/Aids, relationships, and skin-lightening), playing games (like a running-around shoe-switcheroo game, the Game of Life, and flip-flop dodge ball) and just generally getting to know each other. Our official closing festivities (a Guinean take on a talent show, *riz gras*, certificates and gifts) were quickly outshone by the impromptu dancing circle that took us well into the night. It was a wonderful way to say goodbye to a fantastic group of girls.

25 PCVs from Moyenne Guinée (plus one from Haute Guinée and one from Conakry) hosted 38 girls for sessions including public speaking, women's rights, nutrition, family planning and anatomy, and how to give a sensitization. A definite highlight for both girls and volunteers was the panel of professional Guinean women. They shared with us their experiences as working women, the difficulties they had to overcome and the challenges in managing their various responsibilities. Their advice was practical and inspiring *à la fois!* It ranged from how to handle a husband who disapproves of a woman working to how to stay strong in the face of peer pressure to how to make the most of a seemingly bad situation. There were also a number of

opportunities for girls to write and present their own skits on themes like excision and forced marriage. The

percentage of natural hams in this group was pretty impressive!

All in all, I think the girls left feeling empowered to take

responsibility for living healthy and happy lives and motivated to share what they learned with others in their communities. (And volunteers left with the feeling of a concrete, positive, large-scale project under their belts.)

Thanks so much to all the donors: you made this year's conference possible!



Above: Conference participants. At left: Girls play "the game of life"



School Renovation in Koïn

Sam Levin, G15 Koïn '08-'09

This summer the elementary school in Koïn saw its first renovations in over 50 years. Making this project a reality has been a small miracle. Peace Corps has been working on this school for six years now. Finally, thanks in part to Friends of Guinea the wait is over. With the funds received we were able to repair the terrace and completely replace the roof.

Now when school starts this year, students will have a roof (without any holes in it!) for the first time in a long time. Al barka bwi!

DRE Labé, DPE Tougué,

DSEE Koïn

A mes amis (Amis de Guinée)
aux USA

Mes frères,

Juste pour vous dire merci et

vous témoigner toute notre reconnaissance pour votre contribution dans le cadre de la rénovation de l'école primaire de Koïn-centre. Grâce à vous, nous avons fini la réparation de tout le toit. Je profite de l'occasion pour dire bon jour à Leslie Noa, ancienne volontaire à Fatako, à Safi [Kristi Thane] et Souleymane [Ryan Derni] tous deux anciens volontaires à Koïn sans oublier vos familles respectives.

Mamadou Mouctar Baldé

DSEE de Koïn



FOG commission on Amazon Purchases

Happy Holidays! As you start gearing up to flex your weary pocketbook, take a few extra seconds to let some of those hard-earned pennies go towards FOG and projects in Guinea. Use the Amazon link at <http://friendsofguinea.org> (or at <http://www.friendsofguinea.org/getinvolved/getinvolved.shtml>) to make your purchases from Amazon, and up to 5% of your purchase price will go to FOG! If we all take a few moments to click, we can fund all our organizational expenses for the year, leaving our funds to be used for the things we really care about -- helping Guinea, especially in this time of great need.



Class of 1997-1999 wreaks havoc and eats too much food *Stephanie Chasteen (Baguinet, '97-'99)*

This October, on the 10th anniversary of our departure from Guinea, we crammed about 37 people (20 RPCVs, 6 spouses or significant others, and about 11 children) into two mansion-like vacation rentals on the Outer Banks. For most of a week, old friends came and went and we soaked in the hot tub, frolicked in the warm surf, and somehow managed to pull together meals for almost 40 people – grilled salmon, chicken tangine, take-out tacos, all washed down with plenty of wine and beer. We shared stories from times in Guinea and caught up on our lives over the past 10 years.

Nolan Love – designated chef and cat-herder extraordinaire -- remembers our nighttime swim in the warm North Carolina waters: *"I loved seeing the bioluminescence in the water which I hadn't seen since swimming at the islands off the coast of Conakry. I was delighted to go kite flying and sand-castle/alligator building with all of the charming kids on the trip. Made me feel like a kid myself. Sitting all together and singing "Leaving on a Jet Plane" and playing "El Hadji Koba" for everyone was a real treat for me -- really brought me back."*

Ann Grodnik gives her happy brain-dump of the weekend: *"Big, yummy family dinners; beach walks; sing-a-longs; rehashing Guinea stories; hanging with the kids; meeting new babies; drawing spouses and partners into the fold; hot tubbing; reconnecting; catching up; laughing; playing Screw the Pooch; retelling Peace Corps stories; sharing new stories; ocean swimming; big, yummy family breakfasts; beers; old photos; feeling fortunate and well-loved."*

You can see all photos from the event at <http://tinyurl.com/yg5xkaw>. Thanks so much to Alison Kane for über-organization skills and pulling this together. We plan to do another one next year at Lake Tahoe!



Above, photo by Jen Jurlando. Left to right: Ann Grodnik, Lynne McIntyre, Kerry Philp, Ann's husband Kyle

Below, photo by Jamie Folsom. Kerry Philp, Caroline Fichtenberg, and Casey Golab look at photos from service



At Right: The whole gang – left to right – Gail Potter, Casey Golab, Lia Ernst, Herb Caudill, Lynne McIntyre, Stephanie Chasteen, Shirley Woodward, Jamie's wife Beth, Jamie Folsom, Kerry Philp, Shannon's bf Nolan, Shannon Fagerlund, Anne's husband Kyle, Anne Grodnik, Jennifer Jurlando, Nolan Love, Megan Wilson, Josh Johnson, Alison Kane, Scott's family Rhonda, Mara and Owen, Scott Matthews. Not pictured: Caroline Fichtenberg, Duane Duke and wife Liz, Jennifer's husband Philip + boys, and several kids!



ÇaVa?

3605 Reedsport Ct, Sacramento CA 95826



Visit us at: <http://friendsofguinea.org>