

Guinea: Ensuring Democratic Reforms

I. OVERVIEW

The political and economic change Guineans demanded in 2007 at the cost of nearly 200 lives is in jeopardy. The dismissal on 20 May 2008 of Prime Minister Lansana Kouyaté and his replacement by Tidiane Souaré, a close ally of President Lansana Conté, puts reform at risk. Calming talk of inclusion and pursuit of “change” from the new head of government should fool no one. Unless robust internal and external pressure is applied, there is every chance the government will break the promise of credible legislative elections in December 2008, compromise economic revival and bury the independent commission of inquiry tasked with identifying and prosecuting those responsible for the 2007 crackdown. Civil society actors, heads of political parties, religious leaders and all who want real change must present a united front against restoration of the Conté dictatorship.

Political parties, civil society and ordinary citizens had great expectations for Kouyaté, a prime minister initially endowed with powerful popular support. However, Crisis Group’s assessment of his government in November 2007, after only seven months in power, already identified the end of the honeymoon. It pointed to mounting disillusion among the populace, despite encouraging results in controlling inflation, stabilising the economy and restoring credibility to the Guinean state in the eyes of donors.

Despite the mounting discontent of trade unions and the advice of civil society organisations, which had favoured his selection and were his core support base, Kouyaté made no attempt to put aside his personal ambitions, prioritise reforms or reply publicly and convincingly to accusations of poor management of public resources. Paralysed by the continual obstruction of Conté and his allies and cut off from Conakry’s political and intellectual elite, the prime minister was progressively neutralised and finally sufficiently weakened for the president to be able to dismiss him without fear of new demonstrations.

The tension in military camps in Conakry and other cities on 23 May; the detention of the deputy chief of

staff of the army by the mutineers; the dismissal of the defence minister; the occupation of Conakry airport by more mutineers on 28 May; the detention of the chief of police on 16 June by discontented police officers and strike action by customs officials have all demonstrated the degree of ongoing political instability in the country.

The nomination of Tidiane Souaré as prime minister serves the interests of the presidential clan well. While an experienced technocrat and minister untainted by the scandals of past Conté governments, he remains, nonetheless, a close Conté ally. His appointment will ensure that little substantial reform will occur.

The mutiny by soldiers, unrest within the national police and strike action by customs officials are symptoms of the disintegration of the state and its incapacity to provide security. If Conté and Souaré cannot find a solution to the continued security sector unrest, the risk of a military coup, with its possible violence and ethnic divisions, cannot be ruled out. It is essential that the security sector regains stability and that Souaré moves towards organising legislative elections for December 2008. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union (EU), the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA), France, the U.S. and Guinea’s other external partners must send a common message to the new prime minister and not hesitate to make any direct assistance to the government conditional on the following priorities:

- organisation of legislative elections in December 2008, without calling into question the prerogatives of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI). Revision of electoral lists must continue, supported by a regional and international observation mission;
- provision of financial and logistic support and security measures (protection of investigators and witnesses) necessary to launch the independent commission of inquiry into the events of June 2006 and January-February 2007;
- drawing-up of an action plan against drug trafficking and the opening of inquiries to support the prosecution of traffickers, including into the alleged

involvement of individuals close to the president;
and

- opening of discussion, with participation of opposition parties and civil society, on the status, pay and benefits of soldiers, the strict neutrality of the army during elections and the investigation into crimes committed in 2006 and 2007. This should be part of a package to include the strengthening and reform of military institutions.

II. KOUYATÉ'S GOVERNMENT RUNS OUT OF STEAM

The legal and political limitations of the 27 January 2007 agreement, which led to the appointment of a consensus prime minister, were to prove fatal for Lansana Kouyaté.¹ Conté remained head of state with constitutionally guaranteed powers and, commander in chief of the armed forces while the position of prime minister and head of government was never confirmed in the Guinean constitution. His only legitimacy lay in a tripartite agreement concluded between the unions, employers and the government, which was forced to make short-term concessions under pressure from the street.

A. RESISTANCE FROM THE CONTE SYSTEM

Kouyaté cut himself off from the ordinary Guineans who had welcomed him as a saviour and from Conakry's political and intellectual elite.² He hesitated over the path to take, handling the presidential clan more carefully than necessary, forming a supposedly "consensus" government without consulting or including opposition political groups, and revealing his personal political ambitions through the creation of support

¹For a description of the political, economic and social situation in Guinea since 2003, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°74, *Guinea: Uncertainties at the End of an Era*, 19 December 2003; Crisis Group Africa Report N°94, *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, 14 June 2005; Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°37, *Guinea in Transition*, 11 April 2006; Crisis Group Africa Report N°121, *Guinea: Change or Chaos*, 14 February 2007; and Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°49, *Guinea: Change on Hold*, 8 November 2007. These limitations, particularly the absence of a constitutional amendment to define and guarantee the powers of the prime minister, who was only appointed in the wake of widespread protest, were also raised and discussed in earlier Crisis Group Reports, *Change or Chaos* and *Change on Hold*, both op. cit.

²Crisis Group interviews, social and political figures, Conakry, March 2008.

clubs and his wife's "first lady" media activity.³ His lack of determination to meticulously execute the reform road map and draw support from those in Guinea who really wanted change and who could help free him from the power of the Conté clan left him exposed to the latter's hostile manoeuvres.

The influential figures in the Conté system, such as Secretary General of the Presidency Sam Soumah and Head of Protocol Idrissa Thiam, fought Kouyaté aggressively. Other opponents worked in the shadows, including the presidency's former strong man, Fodé Bangoura; former ministers, governors and prefects who had lost their power and wealth following the uprising in January 2007; and Conté's favourite businessman, Mamadou Sylla. For them, even the insubstantial, equivocal change introduced by Kouyaté's government was unacceptable and dangerous, an attack on their privileges and plundering. The extent of this plundering was partially revealed by management audits of ministerial departments and other branches of the administration over the fifteen months prior to the change of government in March 2007.

Referred to in the prime minister's mission statement and carried out by public and private auditors, these audits involved eighteen ministries, three general secretariats, eight administrative regions and 40 public bodies. They revealed the extent of waste: fraudulent subtraction of assets, public work paid to companies but never carried out and deliberate violations of all the basic rules of public accountancy. In total the public money that disappeared or was spent without proper justification was estimated at more than 269 billion Guinean Francs (FG) – about U.S.\$60 million at current rates. These audits also documented illegal occupation of land and public buildings, private use of state vehicles, the disappearance of tractors and other agricultural equipment and continued payment of salaries to 13,392 fictitious or deceased civil servants.⁴ This kind of embezzlement, probably underestimated by these audits, which only looked at a limited period, illustrates the systemic nature of the theft of public resources within the Guinean state under Conté.

³Lansana Kouyaté's wife created the Ansa-Vie organisation which undertook to fit out Conakry's junctions and decorate them with flowers. Although the initiative itself cannot be condemned, it could only raise questions over Kouyaté's ulterior motives. The large amount of media coverage of the Kouyaté couple's work outside their official framework was not what was expected from a transition prime minister.

⁴"Audit report: the details of the scandal of the audited ministries", "Audit report in the administrative regions: all the details of the scandal", and extracts from audits on each ministry published on www.guineenews.org.

Indeed, the Conté system organised resistance to the consensus government's vague reforms in order to safeguard its privileges. Conté also very clearly announced the fate he intended for the transition government in an interview in June 2007, three months after Kouyaté was appointed. "There is no open transition. I am in charge, the others are my subordinates... neither the unions nor overseas bodies have forced me to appoint a prime minister... The day he no longer pleases the country, he will go".⁵ Conté added that it was "a good thing to have a prime minister to be the fall guy in place of the president".⁶

Between December 2007 and May 2008 the president's office hit out at the prime minister through a series of initiatives reaffirming its power: a decree on restructuring the ministries signed without consulting Kouyaté; an end-of-year presidential speech openly criticising the government's performance; Conté's dismissal of the communication minister who had read a statement by Kouyaté calling into doubt the authenticity of a speech attributed to the head of state; appointment as head of the National Communication Council (Conseil national de la communication, CNC) of Tibou Kamara, the journalist most viscerally and personally hostile to the prime minister;⁷ and finally the cancellation by presidential decree of an order from the head of government authorising the sale of hotels belonging to the state to a private Libyan group.⁸ The National Assembly, dominated by the presidential party, also established a parliamentary commission to examine Kouyaté's management of two sensitive financial matters,⁹ a direct response to the audits of the previous government's management.

It appears that Kouyaté also tried to hit back at the presidential entourage, particularly by having Chantal Cole, a regular visitor to the presidential palace, expelled from the country. This Franco-Guinean busi-

nesswoman, who for several years had used her proximity to Conté to become involved in the running of the state and ministerial appointments, had criticised Kouyaté's management in the press, which earned her a period in custody and immediate expulsion to France.¹⁰ This clumsy move of questionable legality enabled Cole to depict herself as the victim and amplify criticisms of Kouyaté's performance. Not without means and support, she arranged for journalists to come to France from Conakry to attend a press conference organised at the Senate in Paris at which she criticised the head of government's actions.

B. AN INADEQUATE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RECORD

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), by sealing an agreement on 21 December 2007 for a recovery programme, recognised the consensus government's efforts in the field of macro-economic stabilisation. Subsequently, in January 2008 the Kouyaté government obtained debt rescheduling and reduction affecting a third of the \$900 million Guinea owed the creditors of the Paris Club.¹¹

The IMF program (a poverty reduction and growth facility worth \$75 million over three years) is supposed to help the government clean up public finances and ensure that the central bank adopts monetary and foreign exchange policies to halt inflation.¹² Such progress is also a necessary condition for Guinea to hope to benefit from cancellation of approximately \$1.1 billion of its foreign debt (totalling more than \$3 billion) between now and 2010.¹³ If the country respects the terms of the IMF agreement it could qualify for the initiative for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) and the multilateral debt reduction initiative.

Much is riding on these reforms, both economically and politically. Eventually, debt servicing could be reduced by \$100 million per year, no longer absorbing an exorbitant share of public income (the interest currently amounts to the equivalent of 80 per cent of public income

⁵"I am in charge, the others are my subordinates", confirms President Conté, Agence France-Presse, 15 June 2007.

⁶Ibid.

⁷This appointment violated the minimum age limit of 40 required to be a member of the National Communication Council, again illustrating the president's and his advisors' flagrant lack of respect for the rules. Crisis Group interviews, Conakry, March 2008.

⁸See "Cancellation of Kouyaté's orders: another blow for the PM", *Le Diplomate Guinée*, 7 April 2008.

⁹The first was a revolving credit file negotiated by the Kouyaté government with a French bank in exchange for domiciliation of mining profits to finance urgent expenditure on public electricity work. The second concerned the management of a project to revive cotton production. The National Assembly judged that the decisions taken by Kouyaté had lacked transparency.

¹⁰See "Press conference at the French Senate: when Chantal discussed her accusations", *Le Diplomate Guinée*, 23 April 2008.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²"The IMF Administration Council approves a PRGF agreement (Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility) for an amount of \$75.2 million and interim complementary assistance as part of the HIPC initiative for Guinea", IMF press release, 21 December 2007.

¹³"Guinea's macro-economic challenges", presentation by Alvin Hilaire, resident IMF representative at the International Union Solidarity Conference to Promote Sustainable Development in Guinea, Conakry, 23-25 May 2007.

from the mining sector). This would free up these resources to improve health-care services, rebuild an education system now in ruins and finance poverty reduction programs.¹⁴ This would attract investment in sectors beyond mining where the impacts on the local economy are much more significant (such as agriculture and agro-industry). New international investment is expected in the mining sector and has already reached bauxite and iron operations (this investment could reach \$27 billion between 2007 and 2015, the equivalent of the country's annual GDP over eight years).¹⁵ Reestablishing relations between Guinea and the international financial institutions was therefore necessary and welcome.

The minister for the economy and finances, Ousmane Doré, formerly at the IMF, enjoys the confidence of donors. He has introduced a minimum of orthodox practices in the management of public finances and has closely supervised the Central Bank (Banque centrale de la République de Guinée, BCRG).¹⁶ The Central Bank was a crucial instrument in Conté's economic distortions, which were responsible for inflation, embezzlement and corruption. In Conakry, observers noted a tightening up on funding within the economy ministry and the beginnings of improvements in the Central Bank's practices.

Unfortunately for Kouyaté's government, the slowdown in the general rise of prices (an annual inflation rate of about 14 per cent in 2007 compared to 40 per cent in 2005 and 2006, the strongest inflation in Africa after Zimbabwe) did not result in greater political approval among the population. Lower inflation in no way implies a drop in prices or increased purchasing power, but simply indicates a slowdown in the erosion of the latter, something not necessarily perceptible to Guinean families. Moreover, this effort to contain inflation was compromised by particularly unfavourable international economic circumstances.

The rise in the price of foodstuffs across the world, and particularly rice, Guineans' staple, and the explosion in the price of oil have had serious economic consequences. The price of a 50-kg bag of imported rice increased from approximately 150,000 FG (about \$33) in March 2008 to 210,000 FG (\$46) in April. Locally produced rice, always more expensive than imported rice, reached 250,000 FG (about \$55). The price of other basic foodstuffs such as cooking oil also rose sharply following

the government's decision of 1 April 2008 to lower petrol subsidies leading to a 63 per cent rise in the price at the pump. The price of a litre of petrol rose overnight from 4,300 FG to 7,000 FG (from \$0.99 to \$1.62). The price of transportation (shared taxis in Conakry and taxis between Conakry and towns within the interior of the country) immediately followed suit.

A modest rise in transport allowances for civil servants, the availability of a few buses for school transport and the arrival at the start of May 2008 of 100 collective transport buses (which Kouyaté initially promised in May 2007) were not sufficient to compensate for the painful explosion in prices and revived memories of the misery which preceded the general strike and uprising in January 2007.

Crisis Group's last report discussed the serious political mistake that Kouyaté had made by promising a radical improvement in the supply of water and electricity within an unrealistic timeframe when the structural problems facing the public utility companies were well known. After an improvement in August and September 2007, due to the effect of the rainy season on hydroelectric production, supply in the capital, Conakry, worsened again to the great disappointment of the population. Even the hope generated by the introduction of electricity supplied by solar energy in the town disappeared as installation was halted. Funding for this project had allegedly not been confirmed before work began.¹⁷ Accusations increased of a lack of transparency in the allocation of resources in this and other projects under Kouyaté. But the government chose not to respond nor to prove publicly that all the rules had been respected.

C. LACK OF COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL VISION

Communication from Kouyaté's government practically disappeared after his first nine months in office. At the beginning of 2008 President Conté abruptly dismissed Communication Minister Justin Morel Junior, who for many had incarnated the desire for change in public radio and television coverage. In his place Conté installed Issa Condé, previously head of Guinea's official and pro-regime press agency (AGP). This episode occurred without consultation with the prime minister, theoretically head of government, and in flagrant violation of the agreement of 27 January 2007. Moreover, the absence of a robust reaction from Kouyaté illus-

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Guinea: socioeconomic pressures continue to build", Oxford Analytica, 24 April 2008.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, international economists and civil servants, Conakry, March 2008.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Conakry, March 2008.

trated how effectively his lines of communication had been neutralised.¹⁸

The government's lack of communication suggested directionless and short-sighted leadership and a faltering determination to honour the road map entrusted to it after the uprising in January 2007. The minimum emergency program, initially widely covered in the media, disappeared from discussion without assessment of its implementation. Furthermore, the prime minister never undertook to explain to citizens the coherency of government action, the difficulties of sharing power with President Conté, the traps put in his path by those against change and his own understanding of the priorities and longevity of his mission. By only speaking when obliged to, before parliament or before the follow-up and evaluation committee for the 27 January agreements (17 April 2008), the former prime minister gave the unfortunate impression that he did not feel he owed the people anything and had forgotten the very special and dramatic circumstances that had elevated him to power.¹⁹

Simultaneously, the government's lack of communication gave free rein to peremptory judgements from national and international figures based on rumour and inadequate information. The positive results in terms of macro-economics appeared derisory. Over and above Kouyaté himself, seen as "discouraged" and "humiliated" by the Conté clan, the quality of the entire government team was also questioned. Apart from "two or three" ministers judged to be up to the job, the others were thought to be incapable of managing their departments.²⁰ Government solidarity and Kouyaté's authority over his ministers, who nonetheless answered to the head of government alone according to the terms of the 27 January agreement, suffered from such perceptions.

Following the dismissal of the communication minister and Kouyaté's inability to "save" him, ministers understood that they would have a greater chance of keeping their portfolios and the associated advantages by remaining loyal to the presidential clan rather than submitting to the prime minister. Solidarity within the "consensus" government disappeared. In its place came

a power-sharing arrangement between those loyal to Kouyaté and those moving closer to the Conté clan.

Such lack of leadership when found at the top of ministerial departments was even more serious because the senior managers in public administration had remained in place in January 2007. Only the ministers, prefects, sub-prefects, managers of the central bank and a few other senior managers within the Interior and Economy and Finance Ministries changed. On 5 December 2007, eight months after the formation of Kouyaté's government, Conté signed a draft decree on restructuring ministerial departments and general secretariats. Due to poor preparation, manipulation from the presidential camp and surprising carelessness from Kouyaté (who was not in the country when the decree was signed), the decree attributed responsibility for "supervision of government action" to the general secretariat of the presidency and ignored the role of prime minister as provided for by the agreement of 27 January 2007.²¹

Despite a subsequent draft corrective decree from the government, the text from 5 December 2007 had still not been repealed in May 2008. Reform of the ministries was therefore also blocked, as were the appointments of senior civil servants. These changes were supposed to turn the spirit of change into concrete modification of how the Guinean administration operated. That Conté's entourage was trying to obstruct them was obvious, but speculation over why the prime minister appeared so acquiescent, while refusing to consider his own resignation, accelerated his fall.

The completion of the audits of ministries and other public establishments for 2006 and 2007 (up to the end of April), before Kouyaté's government had been formed, should have served as political leverage for the prime minister. Publication of a few of the results in the press confirmed the extent of misappropriation of public funds, and a widespread culture of theft and impunity at all levels of management under Conté's presidency. But Kouyaté did not seize the opportunity to capitalise on these revelations, or on the involvement of individuals close to Conté in criminal activity, therefore failing to demonstrate that he was taking a radically different path from earlier teams.

During the last few years some individuals close to the president have indeed encouraged criminalisation of the economy by investing in drug trafficking (cocaine transiting in particular), which has become a serious

¹⁸For more on the circumstances of the dismissal of the former communication minister in Kouyaté's government and the reaction of the latter and social figures, see "Demonstrations and concerns after the dismissal of a minister" and "Warning of a general strike from 10 January", Agence France-Presse, 4 January 2008.

¹⁹Crisis Group interviews, journalists and civil society figures, Conakry, March 2008.

²⁰Crisis Group interviews, political and civil society figures, international civil servants, Conakry, March 2008.

²¹Decree D/2007/041/PRG/SCG on the allocation and organisation of ministerial departments and general secretariats, 5 December 2007, published on www.guineenews.org.

scourge in Guinea, as in neighbouring countries in West Africa.²² The regular seizure of several tons of cocaine in Conakry illustrates this trend. Sources agree that there is a “cocaine axis” between Bissau (capital of neighbouring Guinea-Bissau) and Conakry via the Guinean town of Kamsar (a port close to Guinea-Bissau) and point to the alleged involvement of individuals close to the president, including the red berets of the presidential security battalion (Bataillon autonome de la sécurité présidentielle, BASP) as well as Nigerian traffickers.²³ Therein lies one of the challenges facing rapid political transition in Guinea: ending the establishment of criminal networks which potentially threaten the entire region.

In parallel, the decline of the national consensus, which had prevailed at the time of the 2007 demonstrations, was accompanied by the forceful return of ethnicity into the remarks and strategies of political and social figures, to the detriment of Kouyaté.²⁴ The great distrust between the Peul (or Fulbe) and Malinké (or Maninka) groups quickly fed passions over Kouyaté’s personality and suspicions about the extent of his personal ambitions. Some even went so far as to reproach him for reminding people through his body language and even his dress of Sékou Touré (who like Kouyaté was Malinké). The father of independence had been responsible for the imprisonment, torture and execution of tens of thousands of Guineans and the exile of several hundreds of thousands of others during his 26-year reign.²⁵

The lavish plans for the 50th anniversary of independence, on 2 October 2008, preparation for which Kouyaté delegated to Economy Minister Doré, raised various concerns. Kouyaté’s government was suspected of preparing to “rehabilitate” Sékou Touré, ignoring the victims of the political violence he incarnated. The erection in Conakry of the statue of an elephant on the central roundabout of Bellevue further increased the confusion. The *syli* (elephant in Soussou) denotes the very popular national football team, but for the older generations it is also the symbol of Sékou Touré’s old one-party system.²⁶

After the early criticism, a football was placed at the foot of the infamous elephant to substantiate the idea that it represented the “sports” *syli* with which all Guineans empathise and not the emblem of an era hated by many. Under pressure from an organisation for the victims of Sékou Touré’s regime, Kouyaté’s government attempted to counter these suspicions and on 26 April announced the creation of a “dialogue and reconciliation” commission to examine political violence under Touré’s regime.²⁷ However, the damage had already been done. Kouyaté’s political clumsiness and lack of attention towards the population further undermined the support base which had brought him to power.

III. CONTINUING THE DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

Eighteen months after the Guinean population rose up in force, the country is back to square one. However, the general strike and demonstrations at the start of 2007 did signify one important change – that Guinea’s large population of young people are now rejecting the resignation and apathy of their elders. These young people may now be discouraged by the direction “change” has taken. But it would be wrong to rule out future large-scale demonstrations in Conakry and other towns, directed against symbols of the state and the property of those who are pillaging the national economy.

The risk of a bloody confrontation with Conté’s soldiers is ever present. It could become a reality if the Souaré-Conté government were to return corrupt dignitaries to public office or if it were to jeopardise the organisation of credible legislative elections by initiating systematic fraud. The apparent “normalisation” of the situation should not lull the international community into a false sense of security. This community is led first and foremost by ECOWAS (which last year mediated an ultimately failed resolution of the crisis), the EU (the leading external donor), as well as France and the U.S., which can sometimes exercise strong political pressure.

A. BACK TO SQUARE ONE?

On 20 May 2008 a presidential decree announced the dismissal of Lansana Kouyaté and his replacement by Ahmed Tidiane Souaré as prime minister and head of government. The slow progress of the follow-up and evaluation committee established by the agreement of

²² Crisis Group interviews, Conakry and Bissau, March 2008.

²³ Crisis Group interviews, Conakry and Bissau, March 2008.

²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, civil society figures, leaders of political parties and journalists, Conakry, March 2008.

²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, figures from civil society, leaders of political parties and journalists, Conakry, March 2008.

²⁶ A balanced and neutral religious authority judged the erection of the statue of the large elephant to be “terribly clumsy” and demonstrated “a lack of sensitivity and political intelligence”. Crisis Group interviews, religious authority, March 2008.

²⁷ “A commission will shed light on the Sékou Touré years”, *La Libre*, 2 May 2008.

27 January 2007 and the phony search for a solution to the crisis by the country's leading politicians (particularly the president of the outgoing National Assembly, Aboubacar Somparé) had led to the belief that the agreement would be reviewed. This might have given Kouyaté a final chance to continue to lead the government, at least until the legislative election. But the Conté clan considered, rightly, that it had sufficiently weakened and discredited the prime minister to allow his dismissal without provoking another uprising. The careful choice of Tidiane Souaré was perfectly in line with what Conté needed.

By opting for Souaré, a low-profile senior civil servant, head of ministerial cabinets on three occasions before becoming minister of mines in 2005 and then higher education and scientific research minister in 2006, Conté has sought to reassure the population and the international community. Souaré is a technocrat without apparent political ambition and untouched by scandal, a member of the very small Diahanke ethnic group from the Mali area in the Fouta Djallon, in the majority Peul (or Fulbe) region of Mid-Guinea. Without an independent political base, Souaré presents himself as close to President Conté, who he has served carefully for several years, while underlining his determination to pursue reform.²⁸

Souaré presented himself as the man who could end the institutional infighting within the executive, a consensus figure whose lack of political ambition and access to the head of state would supposedly guarantee national recovery. In his first hours, therefore, the new prime minister made a number of public pronouncements, including to the international press, in order to reassure his fellow citizens and external partners of his good intentions. He indicated that he favoured inclusion and intended to form his government in that spirit, without saying whether he would open it up to opposition parties. He did not neglect to mention his ambition to pursue "change" which was what all Guineans wanted, including, according to him, President Conté.²⁹

The reaction of Guinean political and social figures was muted. The appointment of a dignitary from the regime could have led to spontaneous and potentially violent demonstrations, despite the low expectations for change. In the event, there were a few angry demonstrations after Kouyaté's dismissal, but they were limited to Kouyaté's neighbourhood in Conakry and

his home region. These were to be expected, but the fallout was limited at the national level.³⁰

On 21 May the National Council of Guinean Civil Society Organisations (Conseil national des organisations de la société civile guinéenne, CNOSCG) simply "noted the head of state's decision to replace the prime minister, despite the fact that this was not in line with the agreements of January 2007", reaffirmed "its unwavering support for continuing the process of irreversible change", considered that "holding free and transparent elections" should be "an absolute priority" and called for "mobilisation and vigilance to restart the reform process, and prevent this appointment being a reversal of such hard won progress".³¹ The CNOSCG, Guinea's most important civil society organisation, provided a definitive assessment of the outgoing government: "Guinea has seen no signs of notable change, despite some good intentions by its authorities".³²

The reaction of the main unions, which met on 22 May, was much more forceful. "The replacement of the consensus prime minister by a former minister from the governmental team rejected in 2007 by the nation is seen as a further slap in the face for those working for change. This act goes against the commitments undertaken by the signatory parties (of the agreement of 27 January 2007)".³³ The unions indicated that they could not "accept the return to office of former dignitaries and those who have pillaged the national economy and systematically misappropriated public funds". Without calling immediately for a new general strike, which would have had little chance of being as popular as those of June 2006 and January 2007, the union coalition said that it reserved "the right to use all legal means available to ensure respect for the agreements obtained at the cost of people's lives".³⁴

²⁸ Interview with Tidiane Souaré on Radio France Internationale (RFI), 21 May 2008.

²⁹ "Transfer of power: the speech of new Prime Minister Ahmed Tidiane Souaré in full", 23 May 2008, www.guineenews.org.

³⁰ Crisis Group telephone interviews, journalists and political observers, Dakar, May 2008.

³¹ "Civil society notes the dismissal of Kouyaté and the appointment of Souaré", CNOSCG press release, 21 May 2008, at www.guineenews.org.

³² Ibid.

³³ "Statement from the CNTG-USTG union alliance, expanded to include the ONSLG and the UDTG, following the decree of 20 May 2008 on the appointment of a new prime minister", 22 May 2008. The CTNG is the Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée, led by Rabiadou Sérah Diallo; the USTG is the Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée, led by Ibrahima Fofana; the ONSLG is the Organisation nationale des syndicats libres de Guinée, led by Yamodou Touré; and the UDTG is the Union démocratique des travailleurs de Guinée.

³⁴ Ibid.

The unions, which brought Kouyaté to office and even participated in the government formed in March 2007, are in an uncomfortable position, given the former prime minister's mixed results and the satisfaction of a large part of the political class at seeing him go. But Kouyaté's dismissal and the appointment of Souaré must not obscure the real picture. This was a full and total recapture of power by Conté and his old guard, and risks indefinitely compromising the outlook for democratic political transition and change in the management of the country's affairs. The new prime minister has been associated with the ruling party and the Conté system for too long to be able to threaten the interests of the presidential clan.

In effect, the component parts of the Guinean imbroglio have not changed. The country's main problem is President Conté himself and his clan. His military and predatory approach to exercising power is anachronistic. He was fraudulently re-elected in December 2003 for a third mandate which will only end in 2010. His poor health could justify the declaration of his incapacity but neither of the two figures authorised to take such drastic action (the president of the current National Assembly, Somparé, and the president of the Supreme Court, Lamine Sidimé, former prime minister under Conté) would risk it. Rather, many Guineans, including among the political class, are counting on the possibility of a "good" military coup d'état which would overthrow the old general and open the way to democratic transition overseen by benevolent and progressive officers.

The scenario of a liberating military coup d'état is dangerous and would have little chance of creating a democratic process or of signalling a break with the Conté system. Senior officers are watched and the men in the ranks are undisciplined and quick to endanger the safety of their fellow citizens to see their corporate demands satisfied. There is a risk that the president may unexpectedly depart the scene, which would bring a real risk of chaos, violence and ethnic division. Figures in civil society, leaders of political parties and the international community must work on gradual political transition. The first stage is the organisation in December of legislative elections without any weakening of the prerogatives of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) or questioning of the methods of revising the electoral lists, and with regional (ECOWAS) and international observation.

B. PURSUING THE PREPARATION OF A CREDIBLE LEGISLATIVE ELECTION

Legislative elections had been planned for June 2007, following the dialogue between the presidential coalition and the opposition parties and the political agreement of December 2006. The most important aspect was the creation of an Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) composed of equal numbers of representatives from the opposition and government and representatives from civil society and the administration.³⁵ The general strike and uprising in January and February 2007, followed by the formation of Kouyaté's government, resulted in a delay in the legislative elections.

Initially rescheduled for December 2007, the election is now expected to be held between 23 November and 14 December 2008, according to the still provisional calendar set by the CENI. The commission is chaired by an influential leader from civil society, Ben Sekou Sylla. It began its work in close collaboration with interior ministry departments, as provided for in law, and with the crucial support of the EU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which are financing a support project for the legislative election.³⁶

The role of the CENI and innovation in the electoral process, such as the use of biometrical data and the planned distribution of voting cards with photographs, inspire hope that a credible election will be held. The election preparations finally entered their operational phase in May when electronic equipment arrived for the 978 administrative commissions for the revision of electoral lists to carry out a census of voters; and training sessions for electoral staff were launched.³⁷

These legislative elections represent a crucial stage in dismantling the Conté system by democratic means. For the process to bear fruit, external partners need to conclude funding for the elections (45 billion FG or \$10 million were still missing in May, according to

³⁵The creation of the CENI was the result of a political dialogue demanded by the opposition and required by external partners, particularly the EU, which had suspended their aid to the Guinean government following electoral malpractice by President Conté and his party, *le Parti de l'unité et du progrès* (PUP). See Crisis Group Report, *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.; and Crisis Group Briefing, *Change on Hold*, op. cit.

³⁶Crisis Group interview, Support Project for the Legislative Election and president of the CENI, March 2008.

³⁷"Launch in Guinea of a training programme for 2,100 technical agents and supervision for registering voters", press release, UNDP-Guinea, 28 April 2008.

the government).³⁸ Mobilisation of all Guinean players, particularly those from civil society and the media, to lead awareness-raising activities and citizen education for voters across the country is also needed. Women's organisations must be encouraged to undertake negotiations with political parties with a view to including more female candidates on the lists.

The dismissal of Kouyaté and the appointment in his place of a former minister from the Conté system have led to legitimate fears that the promises of transparency in the run-up to the elections will be broken. Union leaders and those from civil society organisations, as well as leaders of the opposition and the international community, must not allow this. The new prime minister must receive an extremely clear message from Guineans themselves, and from ECOWAS, the EU, UNDP, France and the U.S., as soon as possible: any attempt to pervert the electoral process in favour of the presidential camp, including through the appointment of new prefects, governors and electoral officials from the interior ministry, will have immediate consequences, particularly the freezing of all external aid provided directly to the government. Diplomatic representatives in Conakry must also strengthen their support of civil society organisations for activities raising awareness among the population with a view to being added to the electoral lists and participating in the vote.

C. LAUNCHING THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE EVENTS OF JUNE 2006 AND JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2007

“The creation of the Commission is to be applauded but no progress has been made since its members were sworn in on 31 December 2007”.³⁹ These were the words of the president of the independent commission of inquiry “charged with investigating the crimes, offences and serious human rights violations committed during the strikes in June 2006 and January/February 2007” when he summed up the situation in March 2008.⁴⁰ At that time the commission, created by a law passed by the National Assembly, had no premises or any means of operating. The bank account which should have received a budget of 5,459 billion FG (about \$1.2 million) had just been opened hastily

by the government on the eve of a visit from an EU delegation.

The EU and France had announced contributions of up to €110,000 (about \$150,000) and €200,000 (about \$270,000) respectively. However the government, itself the result of the very events to be examined by the national commission, had not released the first portion of the budget. On 9 April 2008 an initial payment of 1,528 billion FG (about \$339,000) was finally made available to the commission, which should have allowed it to “deal with urgent expenditure such as concluding a leasing agreement, purchasing office furniture, transportation, etc”.⁴¹

The problems of how to protect witnesses and members of the commission and their families, and the selection of a brigade of police officers to investigate on the ground and possibly question individuals had still not been resolved in May 2008, on the eve of Kouyaté's departure. With a one-year mandate to carry out its mission, the commission had barely begun its work after four months. And yet its task is colossal: the 2,400 complaints received across the country at the end of the remarkable work carried out by the CNOSCG await examination. The mission is also perilous because the main leaders of the civilian massacres during the events of June 2006 and January/February 2007 are to be found within the Guinean army and police force, including within the politically untouchable elite corps, which has a particular reputation for brutality, the BASP or Presidential Guard.

With regard to this issue in particular, the former prime minister's political will fell short of expectations.⁴² At no time did he indicate that beginning and accomplishing the inquiry's work was one of his priorities. By this delay in appointing the members of the commission and in releasing the finances it needed, Kouyaté again gave the impression that he had forgotten the circumstances of his appointment and the great distress of the hundreds of families of victims who were killed or injured. By failing to make the most of the first months after the uprising at the beginning of 2007, Kouyaté lost the historic opportunity to mark a new direction in a country corroded by impunity since Sékou Touré's First Republic (1958-1984). Nevertheless, the inquiry must now concentrate on the job in hand and receive robust public support from the international community.

³⁸ “Organisation of next legislative election: 45 billion FG still to be found”, 15 May 2008, www.guineenews.org.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Conakry, March 2008.

⁴⁰ On the bloody events of January and February 2007 see Crisis Group Report, *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.; and *Change on Hold*, op. cit.

⁴¹ “The Independent National Inquiry Commission will soon be operational according to Mr Mounir, President of the Commission”, 10 April 2008, www.guineenews.org.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, journalists, human rights activists and international civil servants, Conakry, March 2008.

The second priority for Guineans and the international community is therefore to require Souaré to provide the inquiry with the effective financial, logistical and security support, as set out in law. The latter will require a brigade of police officers to protect members of the commission and their families. Kouyaté may have shown minimal political will to move this issue forward, but it would be wrong to think that Souaré, an established member of the presidential circle, will act with greater commitment. He is unlikely to voluntarily allow the commission to identify those responsible for the violent repression which saved Conté's regime. However, this is not a reason to let the commission die, nor to forget the victims. This would simply prepare the ground for future scores to be settled outside the formal justice system.

Human rights organisations, other figures from civil society, opposition political parties and religious authorities must show the new head of government that they will not accept impunity and must demand that the inquiry's work continues. The UN, through its High Commissioner for Human Rights, the EU, France, the U.S. and the country's other partners must send a common message to the prime minister and make this the second criteria for re-assessing their cooperation with the government, alongside the organisation of credible elections.

D. NEGOTIATING THE POLITICAL NEUTRALITY OF THE SECURITY FORCES

Nothing better illustrates the return of the Conté system than the mutinies of 21 and 23 May 2008 when discontented soldiers again held the country hostage in total impunity in order to obtain satisfaction of their corporate demands. Under the consensus government, soldiers had to agree to pay 60 per cent of the market price for a bag of rice, compared to less than 10 per cent before. At the beginning of 2008 they also each received an initial payment of 1 million FG (about \$222) as compensation for arrears of allowances and then a second payment in accordance with the agreement obtained with the defence ministry. The latter had undertaken to pay them 7 million FG (about \$1,550) in total.⁴³ A delay in the payment of the outstanding balance of the promised allowances led to a further

change of mood among soldiers in several camps on 26 May and the "hostage taking" of the army's deputy chief of staff, General Moussa Sampil, who had come to negotiate with the mutineers.

As in May 2007, Conté decided to sacrifice his second defence minister in a year, General Bailo Diallo, who departed on 27 May. He also promised payment of the allowances demanded by the soldiers and the release of soldiers who had been detained for a year on the island of Kassa in the bay of Conakry.⁴⁴ Once more, he resolved a crisis by giving in to the demands of the men who constitute his power base. However, this cannot be a sustainable solution to the poor management of the Guinean army. Political dialogue must also be opened with the military leadership to ensure that the security forces stop acting as the last bastion of dictatorship and play a positive role in the democratic transition.

The measures taken by Conté, rather than preparing the ground for a sustainable solution, encouraged police officers and customs officials to follow the soldiers' example. On 16 June discontented police officers who had been demanding 600,000 FG (\$136) in allowances and promotions fired into the air and kidnapped the head of the national police force for more than 24 hours. The same day customs officials began a strike for the same reasons. These recurrent expressions of discontent have added to the feeling of insecurity in the country.

There is no medium-term alternative to thoroughgoing reform of the army and the entire security sector, involving external assistance from ECOWAS and other partners. In the short term, the Souaré government must take discussion of the status, allowances and advantages of soldiers out of the restricted circle of President Conté, the heads of the army and the economy minister and must engage political parties and civil society in the debate. This debate must include securing the army's political neutrality during elections and investigations into the crimes committed in 2006 and 2007, in exchange for renewing and reviving the Guinean military.⁴⁵ ECOWAS must encourage the authorities in this direction.

⁴³ Shots were heard inside the Alpha Yaya Diallo military camp in Conakry, located near the airport, on 26 May and then in Kindia and N'zérékoré in the provinces, creating panic and recalling the episode in May 2007 when discontented soldiers fired into the air for several days and nights (killing civilians with stray bullets) and also pillaged shops. "Shots at camp Alpha Yaya Diallo in Conakry", 26 May 2008, www.guineenews.org.

⁴⁴ "The Government gives in to the some of the mutineers' demands", 27 May 2008, www.guineenews.org.

⁴⁵ A woman was killed on 26 May in the town of Kindia when soldiers fired inside and outside their camps. At least two others were killed and 22 injured after this mutiny. "Deaths, thefts and pillaging: what do our soldiers want", 27 May 2008, www.guineenews.org; and "Marching in the barracks: Brigade General Bailo Diallo dismissed!", 27 May 2008, www.lediplomateguinee.info.

Finally, France, the U.S. and all donors must put pressure on the new government to launch an investigation into the alleged infiltration into the security forces and the presidential guard of transnational drug-trafficking networks, and develop a convincing plan to combat such trafficking and to prosecute traffickers. This would be the best way to deny or substantiate the serious suspicions of the existence of a cocaine axis involving the use of public funds in which individuals close to the president are allegedly implicated. The criminalisation of the state is an obvious obstacle to any political and democratic change and a threat to the whole of West Africa. It must now be included in the political dialogue between Guinea and its external partners.

IV. CONCLUSION

Political uncertainty has been the norm in Guinea for nearly five years. It was initially related to fears over President Conté's health, which deteriorated from 2003, and was exacerbated by weak institutions, regional instability and the unpredictable attitude of an ethnically and generationally divided army. Conté survived illness and the threats of insecurity coming from his borders with Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire,

but his third mandate proved to be a sadly predictable economic and social catastrophe.

The newfound strength of civil society in general, and the unions in particular, provoked general strikes and demonstrations on an unprecedented scale in January and February 2007. But fifteen months after the uprising and the arrival of a promising "consensus" government, the country is back to square one. The appointment of a new prime minister from within the Conté system has put the possibility of political transition, the fight against impunity and even peace in the barracks at risk. The soldiers' uprising on 26 and 27 May 2008 punctuated by shots into the air which terrorised the population was a vivid demonstration of this.

Reviving hope for change while keeping peace and unity within the country will require a difficult combination from Guinea's social and political figures: determination, cohesion and realism. The international community must make a clear choice in favour of the gradual but irreversible neutralisation of the Conté regime. In the short term, the priority must be to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process and resolutely continue the work of the independent inquiry into the events of June 2006 and January-February 2007.

Dakar/Brussels, 24 June 2008

APPENDIX A

MAP OF GUINEA



APPENDIX B

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AGP	Guinean News Agency (Agence guinéenne de presse)
BASP	Autonomous Battalion of Presidential Security (Bataillon autonome de la sécurité présidentielle)
BCRG	Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea (Banque centrale de la République de Guinée)
CARLE	Administrative Commissions for the Revision of Electoral Lists (Commissions administratives de révision des listes électorales)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
CENI	Independent National Electoral Commission (Commission électorale nationale indépendante)
CMRN	Military Committee of National Recovery (Comité militaire de redressement national)
CNC	National Council of Communication (Conseil national de la communication)
CNOSCG	National Council of Guinean Civil Society Organisations (Conseil national des organisations de la société civile de Guinée)
CNTG	National Confederation of Guinean Workers (Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée), an umbrella union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
PRGF	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility
ONSLG	National Organisation of Free Unions of Guinea (Organisation nationale des syndicats libres de Guinée)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
HIPC	Poverty reduction programme for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries, initiated by the IMF and the World Bank
PUP	Party for Unity and Progress (Parti de l'unité et du progrès), President Conté's party currently in power
RTG	Guinean Radio and Television (Radio et télévision guinéenne)
UDTG	Democratic Union of Guinean Workers (Union démocratique des travailleurs de Guinée)
EU	European Union
USTG	Trade Union of Guinean Workers (Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée)