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Policy Brief: Guinea-Conakry. Causes and responses to possible conflict.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current political trends in Guinea are worrying: frequent electoral violence; arbitrary arrest and detention of opposition leaders, economic deprivation; frequent border crises between Guinea and Liberia, and Guinea and Sierra Leone, and growing social discontent. As this report is being disseminated, Alpha Condé, leader of the *Rassemblement de Peuples Guinéen* (RPG) party, has been sentenced to five years of imprisonment with hard labour. Condé's sentencing throws up a range of new scenarios. It is important to note that it is occurring within the context of a rapidly deteriorating situation. In a region already ravaged by brutal civil wars and the uncontrolled movement of militants and light weapons, such political tensions could plunge Guinea into violent conflict. Possible outcomes include civil war, violent protest especially from Upper Guinea (*Haute Guinée*,

home of the imprisoned Alpha Condé) or, following the example of neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, military intervention through a coup d'état. Already home to more than 600,000 refugees from neighbouring states, the country's infrastructure may not be able to cope with any full-scale violent uprising. It seems probable that catastrophic consequences, requiring major humanitarian intervention, would result from any large-scale violent protest.

Data on Guinea-Conakry

Area: 245,857 km²
Resident Population (1996 estimates): 7,164,893
GNP per head (1990 -1995): \$550 US
Population Growth Rate: 2.9% per annum
Human Development Index: 0.398
Position Human Devt. Index 1997: 161/174
Poverty Index: 50%
Life expectancy: 47 years
Birth rate (per thousand): 18
Mortality rate (per thousand): 220
Infant (under 5 years of age) Mortality rate (per thousand, 1993): 130
Education rate (1998/99): 53%
Female child education rate (1998/99): 39.9%
Adult Literacy rate: 36%
Illiteracy rate (1998): 65%
Major ethnic groups; Fullah (Peul), Malinke (Malingo),
Sousou who constitute approx. 35%, 25%, 30% respectively.
10% of the population are the Forest tribes.

KEY INDICATORS

From a review of social, political, economic, and regional conditions, the conclusion of the authors of this report is that conditions in Guinea are more likely to favour instability than stability. Listed below are a number of accelerating indicators which could trigger a degeneration into violence, (violent regional protests, a civil war, or a coup d'état), particularly if nothing is done to alleviate the situation.

1. The Alpha Condé Affair

The Alpha Condé affair is undoubtedly a time bomb that could explode or die a natural death, depending on the way it is handled. Condé returned to Guinea from exile in France to contest the December 1998 presidential elections against the incumbent President Lansana Conté. Lansana Conté was returned for another term as president, but there were widespread allegations of election rigging, which cannot be verified in the absence of an independent electoral commission in Guinea. Condé was arrested on 15 December 1998, accused of illegally attempting to cross the border into Côte d'Ivoire. He was detained for approximately 15 months without trial, and together with 47 alleged accomplices now stands accused of planning an armed invasion of Guinea from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. The political tension generated by the case and the sympathy for Condé in the national and international press have exposed the fragility of democracy in Guinea.

The trial that began in April 2000 is increasingly being perceived as a ploy used by the Conté administration to deal with its main political rival. During the hearing, 2000 demonstrators defied a heavy military presence and besieged the courtyard chanting anti-government slogans. Clashes with the teargas-throwing police resulted in injuries and further exacerbated the tension surrounding the trial. The matter has been adjourned *sine die*. In a hearing in May 2000, Lieutenant Lansana Keita, one of the 47 alleged accomplices on trial, disclosed that he was asked to implicate Alpha Condé in a plot to overthrow the government. Tensions continue to mount and condemnation of Condé's arrest is mounting. With Condé's sentencing to five years of hard labour at point of the dissemination of this report, the situation is becoming acute.

2. Elections

Three major elections face Guinea over the next three years: the Rural Development Council, Parliamentary, and Presidential Elections. Presidential elections are due in 2003 when President Lansana Conté is expected to constitutionally retire; parliamentary elections, constitutionally due in June 2000, had not even been announced at the time of writing in August 2000. Electoral violence is a strong possibility as Guinea moves towards these elections. It may not lead to civil war or the unseating of the government but the humanitarian disaster it could cause, especially in rural areas, could plant the seeds for future national strife.

The decentralisation process started in 1985, and resulted in the division of Guinea into 303 rural development councils (CRDs), 38 urban councils, 270 districts, and 1,700 *quartiers*. Article 114 of the Guinean Constitution decrees that elected local council representatives have a mandate of 4

years. In June 1999, the mandate of the present council representatives expired. In the absence of elections, government administrators went ahead with the dismissal and appointment of presidents or mayors in some councils. In order to give credence to this unconstitutional appointment of CRD heads, the government hurriedly proposed a law authorising administrators to appoint heads of districts and *quartiers*. However, the February extraordinary session of the National Assembly rejected the bill. Elections were finally held on 24 June 2000 and the government won under dubious circumstances. At least 12 persons were killed in election violence, many in Upper Guinea, the political stronghold of the imprisoned Alpha Condé.

3. Politicisation of the Refugee Problem

There are growing allegations that an uncontrolled influx of thousands of refugees may have facilitated infiltration by rebels or bandits. Quantities of light ammunition have also been smuggled into Guinea and Conakry. Border towns in the Forest region have seen an unprecedented resurgence of banditry. The government of Guinea blames the refugees for its socio-political and economic problems and this mobilisation of a xenophobic and hostile relationship between refugees and citizens of Guinea could lead to fatal violence.

4. Strained Relations in the Mano River Basin

Political relations between Guinea and Liberia worsened following a deadly ambush at Macenta in September 1999 in which Liberian soldiers were blamed for the death of 27 Guineans. Calm was only restored on the Guinea-Liberian border following negotiations at an extraordinary summit of the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) in Abuja. Sierra Leonean rebel incursions into Guinea's Forécariah region in May and September 1999 have not been taken lightly in Conakry due to the human casualties and material damage. In July 2000, a third dissident incursion into Liberia was launched from the border with Guinea. The Liberian government has registered serious concern and threatened to pursue the dissidents into Guinea. All three governments within the Mano River Basin believe that the situation has degenerated beyond the management capacity of ECOWAS alone and sustained intervention will be urgently needed to avoid a full-scale war between Liberia and Guinea. Such an inter-state war could help stabilise internal tensions in Guinea but would heighten tensions in Liberia.

5. Fuel Price Riots

Guinea depends on neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire to meet its fuel requirements. The lack of control over the essential commodity of fuel oil, coupled with growing abject poverty, heightens Guinea's vulnerability to sudden price increases. In the recent student fuel price riots, a contributing factor was the actions of speculators who withheld their stocks so that prices skyrocketed. Consumers also bought and hoarded supplies in their homes, regardless of the risks involved. On 21 March 2000, serious riots erupted in the industrial city of Kamsar as angry students in the town's secondary and high schools descended into the streets, destroying property and smashing cars in protest over increased transportation fares and the scarcity of public transportation.

6. Growing Indiscipline in the Security Forces

Guineans currently live in fear as criminals terrorise the population. On the pretext of providing security, policemen and soldiers cordon off targeted areas and conduct mass arrests. Those

arrested in such situations are taken to police stations where they have to 'buy' their way out. The behaviour of the Guinean security forces has come under serious attack. A highly acclaimed measure to set up *police de proximité* (neighbourhood police) by members of civil society for their own protection, never got off the ground. Extortionate and unauthorised raids during which money, watches, expensive jewellery and other items are seized are commonplace. The roadblocks erected along major road axes are alarming. Disgruntled youth in some neighbourhoods are planning counter-attacks by setting up their own vigilante groups.

SCENARIOS (SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 2000)

The following scenarios are developed from the key conflict accelerators discussed in above.

I The Alpha Condé Affair

1.1 Mounting tensions as a result of Condé's sentence (Most Probable)

As a result of Condé's sentence, tensions rise in his strongholds of Upper Guinea and the Forest region. Condé's supporters launch a rebellion, taking control of gold and diamond mines in the area and recruit mercenaries. International diamond and arms traffickers exploit the situation, and a rebellion similar to Sierra Leone or Liberia develops.

1.2 Alpha Condé is released by President Conté (Fairly Probable)

In view of mounting tensions, and international pressure, President Lansana Conté uses his constitutional powers to release Condé. Conté opens a dialogue with the opposition and initiates a series of national reconciliation meetings, placing the country's interests above political and personal considerations.

2 Elections

2.1 A Change of Government (Fairly/ Very Probable)

The opposition closes ranks to present a joint candidate, with a possible alliance between Alpha Condé's RPG party and Ba Mamadou's UNR party.

2.2 Lansana Conté Seeks a Third Term (Fairly Probable)

Leaders and supporters of the ruling PUP party petition President Lansana Conté to consider standing for a third term. A bill is sent to Parliament for consideration, and is passed in spite of strong opposition. The President is able to continue in office.

2.3 Parliamentary Elections Lead to Violence and Unrest (Very Probable)

The overdue parliamentary elections are announced while Alpha Condé remains in prison. The opposition parties boycott the elections and stage protests. The government deploys military forces to quell the protests and violent uprising begins in all major opposition regions. Refugees struggling to escape fighting in Sierra Leone take advantage of the situation and make their way into Guinea. Others, including militarised youths, join the uprising and begin looting and vandalising communities. The government reacts with greater force and the situation escalates.

2.4. A Military Coup (Fairly Probable)

The military take advantage of heightened political tension coupled with a worsening economic crisis and massive discontent and instigates a popular and bloodless coup. The new leader defines his mandate, and promises free and fair elections, setting up a political timetable. He releases all political detainees, including Alpha Condé, and introduces popular changes in the running of the country.

2.5. Election Violence Increases in Scale (Fairly Probable)

Parliamentary elections are announced. Youths victimised in the CRD (local government) elections vow revenge, arming themselves and staging violent protests during the elections at polling stations in communities they suspect to be responsible for their grievances. Violent attacks begin as youths clash with the military. The youths are subdued but the soldiers massacre members of their communities, planting further seeds of resentment.

3. Violence against Refugees Increases (Probable)

The government continues to use the refugee situation as a scapegoat for its own failures, mobilising hatred and resentment that leads to increased attacks on refugees. The refugees threaten to fight back and the government intervenes by imposing strict regulations on the refugees. Many are arrested in the streets and sent back to camps.

4. Liberian Soldiers Cross the Border and Force Dissidents into Guinea (Probable)

The Liberian army succeeds in subduing dissident forces; fleeing dissidents enter Guinea. Unruly Liberian soldiers enter Guinea, looting and vandalising Guinean border villages. The Guinean government makes a complaint to ECOWAS, but the authority delays and takes no action. Guinea fights back to protect its territorial integrity and a full-scale war begins between Guinea and Liberia. As the situation degenerates, Guinean dissidents take advantage of the situation and stage a coup. Fleeing refugees move towards Côte d'Ivoire but are refused entry. A humanitarian crisis begins.

5. Increase in the Price of Basic Necessities (Fairly/ Very Probable)

The influx of refugees results in a shortage of and sharp increases in the price of essential commodities. The price increases are aggravated by the delay or suspension of fuel imports from Côte d'Ivoire. The resulting fuel price speculation makes an uprising imminent. Increased transport fares also make further student riots likely.

6. General Strike (Fairly/ Very Probable)

The long-standing teaching staff dispute remains unresolved. The Union SLECG declares an indefinite strike, nurses and doctors join the strike action and the educational and health sectors are paralysed.

POSSIBLE RESPONSE DIRECTIONS

A number of recommendations were received and formulated by the authors of this report, both during the preliminary work for this study as well as at the WANEP/ FEWER roundtable conference in August 2000. These recommendations are underlined by the belief that the growing trend towards instability in Guinea can be reversed. Guinea and the international community still have time to develop concrete initiatives and undertake concerted preventive action to assist Guinea's return to stability. The recommendations are addressed to the Guinean government, the international aid community and local and international actors, and are listed under the thematic headings given below.

1 National 'Renewal' Commission

With the help of the international community, a national 'renewal campaign' should be launched in Guinea to both prod and seek to work with the established government in addressing the country's problems. The emphasis would thus be put on the positive opportunities available for "preserving Guinea's assets and maximising its opportunities and gains". Participants in the roundtable conference have already resolved to organise such a commission, but this process will need nurturing before Guineans can see the need for and the importance of such a body. Such a commission could be composed of leaders in the public and private sectors, and moderates from all sides including prominent religious leaders, traditional leaders of the main ethnic communities, student leaders and highly respected individuals from the government, business, military, media and NGOs.

The commission's aims would be to focus more attention and public dialogue on selected 'non-political' problems (such as, health, poverty, wealth generation) and to galvanise the diffused political energies in Guinea to address specific problems and solutions. As the Commission gains acceptance, it could begin to create spaces where the government and opposition parties could hold dialogue on issues of common concern. International agencies that could initiate and support the creation of this Commission are the UN system, USAID, the Canadian International Development Agency, and other international and regional organisations.

2 A Speedy and Fair Trial of Alpha Condé

It is generally believed that Alpha Condé's release will help to defuse the political tension in Guinea, worsened by the deepening crisis in Sierra Leone. As leader of the RPG, the opposition party with the strongest support, the situation will deteriorate rapidly if elections are organised while Condé is still in prison.

3 Democratisation

The awareness of the roles and responsibilities of each sector in a democratic society is critical to the survival of democracy as an institution. Western donors often tend to use 'democracy' as a bargaining chip in their relations with poor countries. However, such donors do not commit themselves to the acculturation of such societies to the ideals and tenets of democracy. Political intolerance, electoral violence, and passive compliance with state actors typify the level of understanding of democracy that exists in Guinea.

Two educational programmes should be launched in Guinea. The first educational programme could focus on local council leaders in order to develop their understanding of the tenets of governance and public administration, and could extend to other democratic institutions in Guinea. The programme could draw inspiration from Ghana and Uganda where decentralisation is becoming a success. Agencies that could support such a programme include the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Educational and Social Council (UNESCO) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

A second educational programme could be targeted at the election process to combat electoral violence and electoral fraud. Such a programme could help communities understand the process and be prepared for the consequences of elections. The West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP) would be interested in implementing such a programme through its Board Chairman, who is an expert on the electoral process in Africa. UNESCO, UNDP, CIDA, the International Federation for Electoral System (IFEC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department for International Development (DfID) could be interested in supporting such a programme.

4. Advancement of Democracy

Liberalisation of the media is essential to guarantee the development of a truly democratic culture in Guinea. Independent print and electronic media should be given space to function effectively. Rural and private radio stations have played a significant role in the development of democracy in countries such as Senegal and Mali. Inter-governmental organisations with good relationships with the government should encourage the creation of arenas for such a process of democratisation. One tool that could expedite the realisation of such an environment are the grants and loans to the government of Guinea by the IMF, World Bank and other bilateral organisations. Such financial support could be made conditional to the advancement of democratisation, thus giving the government an incentive to open up the political arena.

5. International Support for Refugees

As hostilities persist in Sierra Leone, the international community should pay particular attention to Guinea. Guinea is likely to receive half a million more refugees than it was accommodating two years ago. The physical, social, educational and emergency health needs of these refugees will be enormous. A Rapid Response Unit for humanitarian intervention should be based in Guinea to respond as promptly as possible to the humanitarian disaster threatening the region. In addition, the increased mobilisation of hatred and xenophobia against refugees by some members of the government should be addressed.

UNCHR or other related agencies could conduct a study of the actual situation of refugees and their role in the political instability in Guinea. Such a study could also advise agencies of the level of preparedness necessary to deal with any outbreak of violence between refugees and the host population. This study would contribute to knowledge of the socio-economic and political impact of refugees on host countries. Lessons learnt would inform the UNHCR of policies that could help address this and other similar situations.

6. Intervention to Prevent Conflict in the Mano River Basin

At a joint ECA/ UNDP Consultative meeting¹, participants recommended the introduction of socio-economic and development projects that could contribute to the consolidation of peace and prevention of future conflicts within the Mano River Basin. With the capacity to mobilise super-ordinate interests, these projects could provide a space for dialogue that could lead to trust or confidence-building measures. The participants argued that such socio-economic initiatives must be organised simultaneously with the United Nations and friendly governments mediating for peace and stability with political leaders of the region. The authors include their recommendations in this study, and propose the following: the promotion of sub-regional civil society reconciliation activities, development projects in the border areas, and the promotion of small-scale private sector enterprise.

6.1. Civil Society Role in Reconciliation

Sub-regional activities geared towards collaborative civil society endeavours should be promoted. These include, in particular, activities undertaken by women's groups, professional and labour organisations, the intellectual elite and teachers, business leaders, religious groups, journalists, youth organisations, student leaders and NGOs. Common programmes could be organised for specific groups of community leaders from within the sub-region, and could consist of workshops, seminars, education for peace, projects on reconciliation and conflict resolution, and opportunities and strategies for civil society initiatives.

The West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP) has already launched a Mano River Initiative for Peace-building (May 2000). NGOs working in peace-building and human rights from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone agreed in a communiqué to work together in bridging the divide between their societies. The first project launched was 'Non-violence and Peace Education within the Mano River'. On 25 September 2000 WANEP, as a member of the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response, will launch an 'Early Warning and Appropriate Response Programme' with NGOs within the Mano River Basin. To be sustainable these civil society initiatives will need support and WANEP proposes USAID, DfID and CIDA and other donor organisations and countries as partners in this civil society action.

6.2. Border Zone Development

Development activities in the border areas, in particular income-generation and employment-creation, need to be initiated quickly to help relieve tensions and promote community level reconciliation. Sustained economic development in the border areas must have a cross-border dimension as the markets for goods and services straddle national borders.

6.3. Promotion of the Small-scale Private Sector

The private sector must be given a role in the creation of an enabling environment to expand its capacity. This must include the provision of mechanisms for active involvement of the sector in sub-regional development, such as facilitating markets in border areas. The promotion of the private sector should include initiatives for micro-finance and small-scale enterprise.

¹ Joint ECA/ UNDP Mission to the Mano River Basin Countries in the Context of the Sub-regional Post-conflict Peace-building Initiative (November 14-27, 1999). Report Written by Sam G. Amoo, Senior Regional Adviser, UNDP.

7. Military and Civilian Relations

In Africa, military and paramilitary forces tend to be mystified and are seen as unapproachable by members of civil society. Security forces perceive themselves as part of the state apparatus and as distinctly removed from society. Its history of repression makes this factor particularly strong in Guinea.

The gap between the military and civilians is not only widening but becoming hostile. A training programme to cultivate relations between the military and civil society would go a long way to instil discipline in the military. Such a programme could be launched with the help of friendly governments such as France, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada. Civic action, including clean-up campaigns where the military could participate with civilians, could help to re-humanise the security forces. Save the Children (Sweden) has initiated a training programme to help the military understand their role as protectors of civilians, especially children, during armed conflicts. WANEP and its partners in Liberia have also initiated a programme called the 'Role of the Paramilitary Forces in Peace-building' which is helping to transform some members of the Liberian security forces.

7.1. Improvement of the Security Forces

A more professional approach and reinforcement of the Guinean army and police forces' capacity to combat rising levels of crime will renew civilian confidence in the security forces. Concrete efforts should be made to instil discipline in the security forces, highly qualified individuals should be recruited to inject new blood into the army, and the forces should be logistically equipped to enable rapid intervention. The international community should help the Guinean government to improve the living standards of its security force staff in order to discourage any future mutiny.