



Desired Democracy in Distress: Breaking the GUINEA Political Impasse

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The euphoria and optimism that greeted the 2010 Presidential elections in Guinea—as the first democratic election since independence in 1958 is gradually fading, and with it, a peaceful and democratic country.

Since the inauguration of President Alpha Condé on December 21, 2010, the legislative elections which were to follow the Presidential elections within six months according to the Ouagadougou Peace Accord have been postponed several times. Disagreements over the election processes including date, voter's register and participation of Guineans in the Diaspora portray the lack of consensus between the government and the opposition. The lack of consensus over these fundamental issues has resulted in series of protests with implications for the conduct of the election, peace and security. According to some media reports, these protests are often intimidated by the security forces using hot water, tear gas and of live ammunitions; while government has also alleged that the protesters engage in acts of vandalisms and throwing of stones on security personnel and destroying property

belonging to the state

Beside the expression of lack of confidence on the electoral process by the opposition, protests have also been organized over the perceived lack of basic amenities such as electricity, water and essential services. There is very strong indication from media reports that, social discontent is feeding into the current political agitation. These socio-economic challenges coupled with the inability to conclude the transition process as contained in the Ouagadougou Peace Accord continue to fuel the political impasse.

Amidst these challenges and extreme stance taken by the government and opposition, the international community is mounting pressure on the Guinean government to organise the legislative elections and conclude the transition process. While this is important, it is also essential to build consensus among the political class on the processes in order to avoid post-election crisis. This policy brief seeks to provide insight on the current political dynamics in Guinea and recommend options for response.

2.0 CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Political, ethnic and regional divisions that characterized the 2010 presidential elections seem to have deepened mistrust among Guineans with prejudice from all sides on the credibility of the transition process. The opposition and the Government are constantly in "Blame Game" on the conduct of the legislative elections especially with regards to the composition of the Electoral Commissioners, election date and review of the voters register. Another contentious issue between the government and the opposition is the registration and voting of Guineans in Diaspora. While the opposition is demanding the registration of all eligible voters living outside Guinea, the government is opposed to it on the grounds of lack of resources and time. The opposition (especially the party of the main opposition leader) views this move as unconstitutional and a deliberate attempt to deprive them of votes from their strong constituencies.

The appointment of Said DJINITT¹ as the facilitator of the dialogue process by the United Nations was giving impetus to the dialogue process and political pundits had thought that this would

¹ Outgoing Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of the UN Office in West Africa (UNOWA).

West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-region including Cameroon and Chad. Our focus was initially the Mano River Basin countries of Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. We have since expanded to cover the entire West Africa sub-region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of

Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

break the current political impasse and move the electoral process forward. However, the sudden announcement of June 30 as the new date of the election by President Alpha Condé has been described by the opposition as disregard to the principles of consensus and dialogue and far from meeting the standards of democratic norms.

The opposition has therefore resorted to persistent protests since the announcement, resulting in a number of casualties from alleged use of hot water, tear gas and live ammunitions in an attempt to disperse protesters and maintain “law and order”.

3.0 KEY ACCELERATING FACTORS

The Government has indicated that the elections will hold on June 30, 2013 with or without the opposition. While the EC is registering voters, the opposition has staged a boycott and asked its supporters not to register until a consensus has been reached on the substantive matters. The opposition also vows to disrupt any election that does not demonstrate transparency, fairness and equal opportunities for all players. Other conflict accelerating factors include:

3.1 Disagreement over the process of revising the voter's register: The Government and opposition political parties are in disagreement over the review of the voters' electoral list. The opposition accuses the Government of unilaterally appointing a South African Company, WAYMAK to review the voters' register, in violation of the Public Procurement Policy of Guinea. Secondly, the opposition argues that WAYMAK has been removed from the United Nations list of credible organizations since 2008 for not meeting international standards. They are therefore asking for the contract to be revoked and a new process that will

ensure inclusivity instituted. The Government on the other hand disputes the allegation of the opposition and maintains that it has confidence in WAYMARK and that the recommendations of the Technical Team of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the FRANCOPHONY would address any shortfall.

3.2 Composition and Neutrality of the Electoral Commission: Another accelerating factor is the composition of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI). The current configuration in which party representatives form majority of the electoral commission does not allow for independence and professionalism. In most cases, party interests derail the commission's agenda and makes decision making cumbersome. The leadership of the EC is another bone of contention as the head is usually associated with political party affiliation and ethnic identity. Based on this perception, the opposition accuses the current president of the EC of taking autarchic decisions in favor of the ruling party.

3.3. Ethnic Cleavages: The deep resentment and ethnic divisions between the Fulas (Peuhl) and the Mandingos in Guinea have not healed following disagreements and eventual confrontation at the end of 2010 Presidential elections. These two main ethnic groups are polarized in every segment making their political allegiances ethnic based and in most cases parochial. Government efforts at reconciling the ethnic groups has been adjudged inadequate and in some cases described by the opposition as “lip service” aimed at scoring political points and impressing the international community. The cracks in the social cohesion of the country continue to present a gloomy picture in the event of any conflict trigger.

4.0 SCENARIOS

In view of the prevailing circumstances in the country, the following scenarios are envisaged:

Best Case – The Government adopts a more open and consensus building approach and through dialogue, ensures the participation of all stakeholders. The Electoral Commission including its head is acceptable to all the parties; the legislative election holds on a new date agreed upon by all stakeholders and the outcome is satisfactory and acceptable by all parties. Guinea's democracy begins to deepen and its citizens eschew ethnic sentiments and show high level of affinity and confidence in the State.

Worst Case– The perception of government exclusion of the opposition continues to widen; the political atmosphere is riddled with skirmishes and violence. The government organizes the election with or without the participation of the opposition; the outcome is rejected and violence along ethnic and party lines is renewed on a larger scale than was observed in the 2010 election (Very plausible).

The government continues to postpone the election on the ground that the atmosphere is not conducive; the opposition is persistent with demonstrations leading to a clampdown on leaders of the opposition thereby inciting violence along ethnic lines (Plausible).

Realistic Case– The mediation process initiated by the United Nations and the work of other international actors including ECOWAS, the AU and civil society weighs on the parties and a consensus on the date and modalities for the election is agreed upon. The elections hold amidst pockets of violence; the international community prevails on the parties to accept the outcome in the interest of peace and security (Very Plausible)

The parties reject the outcome of the election and seek redress in court and engage in “war of words” through international community and the media

on irregularities recorded in the election (Plausible).

constitutional provisions of Guinea relating to the conduct of elections. Independence of the Electoral Commission must not be compromised. It should be allowed to carry out its constitutional mandate without any form of external or internal influence

(comprising of traditional rulers, religious leaders and other stakeholders) who should use their good offices to intervene in the current political impasse and prevail on all stakeholders to reach a consensus and move on with the electoral process

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to mitigate the worst case scenarios, and ensure a seemingly free and fair election that will enhance the peace processes and deepen democracy in Guinea, the following options for response is proposed:

To the Government:

1. The government should broaden the scope of consultation and engagement with the opposition political parties, Electoral Commission (CENI) and the Interim Parliament to ensure that consensus is reached on most of the contentious issues including the dates and processes of the legislative election
2. The security forces should demonstrate professionalism and adhere to its rules of engagement as it relates to managing crowd and protesters; avoiding the use of excessive force and other acts of violence
3. The Government should instil confidence in Guineans and assure citizens of its ability to protect them, demonstrate willingness in the fight against all forms of impunity irrespective of the parties
4. The Government should take all necessary steps to prevent the use of private security forces and ethnic militias by any group or individual as this could undermine the sovereignty of the state
5. There is need for the government and its institutions to improve in the provision of basic amenities and social services

To the Electoral Commission (EC):

6. The EC should show high level of professionalism and uphold the electoral laws and other

7. Embark on massive civic education to clarify rules and procedures for the election in order to instil confidence in the electoral process and be seen to demonstrate independence.

8. The Head of EC should ensure consultations with its members and demonstrate that its decisions are products of consensus

To the Political Parties:

9. The political parties should be open to dialogue and interest based negotiations. Taking positions and refusing to hear one another in the form of dialogue can only continue to create stalemate and perpetuate the current impasse
10. Should hold joint-public programs calling for a non ethnic and identity based politics as well as a violence-free election
11. Educate their supports on the values of democracy and the rule of laws and insist that all actions of the party supporters uphold the tenets of democracy and constitutionalism

To CSOs:

12. CSOs in Guinea should work more closely in monitoring the electoral process. Systems like WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) for monitoring and responding to violent related activities at the pre/ during and post elections stages should be supported. While more CSOs should intensify their efforts on sensitization at the community level and especially among women and other disillusioned groups on the importance of exercising their franchise and voting credible candidates.
13. Support should be given to CSOs to set up a body of Eminent Guinean's

14. Provide elaborate voter and civic education as well as train and deploy local election observers to support the electoral process

To the Security Agencies

15. Security must be boasted in the build up to the elections to ensure that the prevailing perception of the security forces as being engaged in acts of impunity is reduced.
16. The security architecture should be such that radiates confidence and involves the community in the design and implementation

To ECOWAS, the AU and international partners of Guinea:

17. Should monitor the election process closely and use its position to attract other international community to weigh on the parties to come to a round table and agree on the electoral process.
18. Funding from ECOWAS and other international donor agents is needed to support logistical arrangements in the build up to the election
19. Train and deploy long term and short term election observer missions and provide support for same to national CSOs and other national social movements
20. Facilitate the establishment and use of an Inter-Party Advisory Committee for the purpose of dialogue and consultation among the keys actors on elections

6.0 CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis it is evident that ethnic cleavages, political and parochial interest is gradually eroding reasoning needed to push the political process in Guinea forward hence the current impasse. While the holding of the election and completion of transition process is very necessary, efforts should be made to minimize the likelihood of election disputes and post election violence. The realization of this depends largely on the political will to broaden the political discourse and the

agreement of all stakeholders to be open and nationalistic in the process. On the other hand it requires broader stakeholder participation at the state, ECOWAS and international community levels. Already activities have begun at the UN level with the appointment of a new facilitator for the dialogue process, at the AU and ECOWAS level, the support needs to be prioritized and strengthened. CSOs efforts through awareness creation, sensitizations and dialogue at the community levels should be sustained

It is said that in every dark cloud there is a silver lining. Despite the current situation in Guinea, the possibility still exists to break the impasse and hold elections that meet international standard.

² The Guinea Public Procurement Policy stipulates that expenditures exceeding \$20,000 must be advertised and should follow a bidding process before a contract is awarded.



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