



CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE  
T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: [contact@chathamhouse.org](mailto:contact@chathamhouse.org)  
F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 [www.chathamhouse.org](http://www.chathamhouse.org)

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## Transcript

# Guinea in Transition: Reform, Resources and Regional Relations

HE Alpha Condé

President of the Republic of Guinea

Chair: Gita Honwana Welch

Director, UNDP Regional Centre for West and Central Africa, Dakar

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### **Gita Honwana Welch:**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and a very warm welcome to you today to this session on 'Guinea in Transition: Reform, Resources and Regional Relations'. First and foremost, I would like to welcome His Excellency President Alpha Condé and his delegation, which includes the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Minister of Finance and other officials. On the 15 November 1951, [Ahmed] Sékou Touré, the first president of Guinea, told a gathering at Chatham House that Africa faced new and complex problems, and he went on to describe the paradoxes of the colonial experience. Over 50 years later, we are privileged to have with us today His Excellency President Alpha Condé, who has been the president of the Republic of Guinea since 2010.

President Alpha Condé was born in Boké and left for France at the age of 15 to attend high school, and later on the Sorbonne. He obtained a PhD in Public Law at the law faculty of Paris, Panthéon. His professional career began as a teacher, and he was a member of the Faculty of Law and Economics for over 10 years.

He was a political exile from 1970. In 1977 he created the National Democratic Movement (NDM) with Professor Alpha Ibrahima Sow, Bayo Khalifa and other founding members. The NDP later became the Rally of the People of Guinea (RGP). President Alpha Condé spent decades in opposition to a succession of regimes in Guinea. Standing in the 2010 presidential elections, he was finally elected as president of Guinea in a second round of voting according to the official results.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it now gives me great pleasure to invite President Alpha Condé to address this audience on the theme of today's talk: 'Guinea in Transition: Reform, Resources and Regional Relations'.

### **Alpha Condé (translated from French):**

Thank you very much, it is a real pleasure and a real honour for me today to take the floor and address leaders held in such high opinion and such great personalities.

What is our challenge today, and the vision that we hold? If we look at southeast Asian countries 30 years ago, they were very much in the same position that Africa is in today, yet today they are engines of development; they were able to achieve this progress under very strong regimes, not democracy. So the challenge that we face today is to achieve the same type

of development, but this time with democracy. What does this mean concretely in Guinea's case?

In spite of our mineral resources and our agricultural resources, we have not yet known experienced development. As soon as I was elected, I requested the Bretton Woods organizations, such as the World Bank, to come and perform an audit of our situation. We had no relations with the Bretton Woods organizations at the time, so I invited them to come and perform that audit.

The result of this audit led us to engage in a series of reforms with their help, the help of the IMF and the help of the World Bank. But these reforms proved very difficult because change is difficult, change challenges a lot of interests that may have been established already.

We had to tell the truth to the people of Guinea. I quoted Winston Churchill, using his example, as during the World War when he took over the leadership of England, he told the British people that he only promised them blood, tears and sweat, but that truth would be at the end of the struggle. Likewise, I told the people of Guinea that we were about to suffer for three years, because that's what our situation required of us.

We therefore started with macroeconomic challenges, trying to renegotiate our debt through the HIPC programme. But the major challenge we faced was actually the military, because we had a military that was an inverted pyramid where you had more officers than enlisted men, and systematically on 1 November, everybody was promoted in the army. So we started reforming the army, beginning with the biometric census of the army and then retiring 4,000 military personnel. In the last two years, no one was promoted; the systematic promotion system was put to an end to turn the army into a republic army and a meritocracy, so now advancement will be linked to performance.

We have been successful in establishing the macroeconomic balance in the country, but unfortunately this success does not change the daily lives of Guineans; it doesn't change their living standards at the moment. The people are impatient. There is a saying back home: 'an empty stomach doesn't have any ears'.

The twofold challenge we now face is how to tackle the micro economy and change the daily lives of our people, as well as how to advance democracy to parliamentary elections. Guinea is blessed with tremendous potential; this is a chance, which is why we started with a new mining code, pushing the agenda of transparency, publishing all our contracts on the internet.

The new mining code was followed by a review of our cadastres, and we were able to bring back into the portfolio of the state 800 permits, and we are now going to redistribute these permits to companies that really mean to do serious business.

But our main focus beyond mining has been agriculture. Our immediate goal is to reach self-sufficiency and later on to turn our economy into an agricultural export economy.

We however placed the development of our country within a more integrated regional context, because truly with our mining, agricultural as well as hydro energy potential, we are in a position to become an engine for the entire region. But this will only become a reality if we are able to ensure that we have good governance, that we fight against corruption, and that we are able to ensure that development benefits the people of Guinea.

Today, we can pretty much summarize all African problems into one issue: poverty. Many other problems such as Muslim fundamentalism and extremisms can be linked back to poverty because we haven't been able to make a difference in the daily lives of people. But Africa has one tremendous advantage: its population is very young. About 70 per cent of the African population is below the age of 25, and this population is aware, they are informed, they go on the internet so they know what is going on around the world. But for the leaders this is a time bomb because if we are not able to provide jobs for these young people, and we still continue to face youth unemployment, then this becomes a time bomb and we will all be taken out.

So at the African level we face today two objectives as African leaders: how to take control of our mining resources pretty much in the same way that Arab countries were able through OPEC to take control of their oil resources, and also how to ensure that we have the military means and the logistics to ensure our own security. We have to congratulate France for intervening in Mali but it also left us with a feeling of shame that 50 years after independence we still have to rely on a foreign force to ensure our security.

We are convinced that Africa is the future of the world, but this will not become a reality if we are not united. Germany and France had had three wars at the end of the nineteenth century in 1870, 1914 and 1940, yet today they are united; they share one common currency. So today for Africa to rise to the challenge of facing big blocs such as Russia, China and others, Africa needs to unite and become a larger bloc. And with the younger generation that stands for change, we can rely on them to bring about this change.

But we also need to be assisted. If we are to fight against exploitation and bring about transparency, we are going to need the help of the G8 – as mining companies are mostly in the West, they are mostly in the G8 countries, and we will need the G8 to participate in that process. We also need a fairer trade system internationally; we need to have our products being bought at a fair price if we are to have sustainable development. So we are relying on opinion leaders such as yourselves, civil society at large and the press to ensure that the governments here in the G8 countries are pushing for the same agenda of transparency and fair international trade.

We are hoping that our exchanges with yourselves today will advance this agenda and will encourage the G8 to help us and to assist us with our agenda for transparency and fair international trade. Today it is more important for us to listen to you and try to understand how you can help us push our agenda forward. I thank you very much, and I will leave you the floor.