

GUINEA RUNOFF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: REALITIES, RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolving security situation in Guinea is a cause for grave concern in view of the skirmishes and running battles, mainly between supporters of Cellou Dalien Diallo of *l'Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée* (UFDG) and Alpha Conde of *Rassemblement du Peuple Guinéen* (RPG), along ethno-political lines reported on ECOWARN¹ during the month of August, September and October. The election has been reduced to ethnic violence largely between the Peulhs of Diallo and the Malinke of Conde. It has been reported that about 1,800 Peulhs² belonging to the UFDG party resident in Kankan in the far north of the country, a stronghold of Alpha Conde's RPG party, had fled their homes as a result of alleged ethnically-motivated attacks by Malinke supporters of Conde. Some Peulh businesses and houses were reported to have been looted and set on fire. The attacks came about following rumours that Peulh traders were behind poisoned sachets of drinking water distributed at a rally organised by the RPG party of Professor Condé in

Conakry resulting in the hospitalization of about 200 his supporters. The violence is spreading from Conakry to some other towns ahead of the presidential runoff election scheduled to take place on 7th November 2010.

On the whole, the political landscape to the run-up of the second round of the presidential elections has been marred by bloody confrontations and protestations resulting in some instances in the loss of lives and property³. The current political and security climate portends a potentially explosive post-electoral environment that warrants a contingency planning by all concerned particularly the International Contact Group on Guinea, humanitarian agencies and influential sectors of Guinean civil society.

Since the official announcement of the results of the first round of the presidential election – after much contestation amidst allegations of electoral fraud – the country has been under siege by the political class to the benefits of the military regime whose stay in power continues to be prolonged

by default. Much to the chagrin of the Guinean populace, the security situation worsens by the day owing to the dogged “win or die” posture of the two contending candidates Cellou Dalien Diallo of *l'Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée* (UFDG) and Alpha Conde of *Rassemblement du Peuple Guinéen* (RPG) alongside a segment of their supporters who have demonstrated their intention to put ethno-political interest above national interest which could undermine the peace and stability of the country.

As reported in the Daily Highlight of ECOWARN 29th October 2010, a throng of supporters of Alpha Conde besieged his home in the district of Mafanco to prevent him from embarking on a joint-trip with Cellou Dalien Diallo across the country to appeal to their supporters to shun violence and preserve the peace and security of the country. The joint-trip to campaign for a violence-free election was a response to the request of the Interim President General Sekouba Konate to the two candidates to embark on a tour in an attempt to ease tensions and unify the country.

¹ ECOWARN is an online reporting system of the ECOWAS Commission for the purposes of early warning and timely response

² Daily Highlight of ECOWARN of 26th October 2010

³ Daily Highlight of ECOWARN of 27th October 2010

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.

Supporters of Conde's party regarded the tour to be of no value in light of allegations and rumours of poisoning of drinking water and loaves of bread by supporters of Cellou Dalein Diallo.

Moreover, it is most likely that there will be a very low turnout of international election observers in the second round of the election which has been postponed four times in three months. November 7 has been agreed by all concerned as the final date for the election. International election observation missions are very hesitant to send in observers given the heavy financial loss they suffered as a result of the cancellation of the election just two days to the scheduled date of September 19th. The ECOWAS Election Observation Mission had already brought into the country about 150 election observers before the cancellation. The fear factor relating to the possibility of another postponement would lead to a very low turnout of international election observers to adjudge the credibility and transparency or otherwise of the presidential elections.

The high presence of international election observers is very paramount considering the Guinean context where the appointment of the chairperson of the Electoral Commission has been at the centre of controversies, accusations of favouritism, political wrangling and electoral rigmarole. High turnout of international election observers would not only tend to serve as deterrence to electoral fraud and ensure that the electoral commission asserts its independence, but also reassures the majority of Guineans and the civil society that the international community is committed to ensuring the peace and stability of the country.

With the appointment of the Malian, General Siaka Toumany Sangaré, a neutral person as President of the electoral commission, the presence of intentional election observers would also help to calm nerves and boost confidence in the integrity of the electoral process among the distrustful contending parties and their supporters. It will further caution officials of the

electoral commission (CENI) to sit up to their task which will legitimise the process and thereby the elected government.

However, it is increasingly evident that the second round of the elections carries the hallmarks of an explosive post-electoral environment akin to the experiences in Kenya and Zimbabwe. The proclivity for violence in the Guinean context as a means and instrument to accession to power bodes ill for the unity and stability of the country.

2.0. SCENARIO FOR POST-ELECTION IN GUINEA

In the light of the foregoing, this policy brief envisages the following scenarios for post-election in Guinea:

1. Worst Case Scenario: (*Plausible*)

The election is held on 7th November amidst widely reported cases of disenfranchisement as a result of logistical problems or low level of professionalism of the electoral officers giving rise to charges of electoral fraud by the losing candidate calling eventually for the reorganisation of the election. Supporters of the losing candidates take to the street carrying out ethnically-motivated attacks leading to widespread communal violence, significant number of deaths, huge displacement of Guineans into neighbouring countries Sierra Leone and Liberia with implications on the fragile peace of the two countries. The military then declare a state of emergency and delay their exit from power while the two contending parties fight it out in a protracted court battle with no end in sight.

2. Middle Case Scenario: (*Very Plausible*)

The election is held on 7th November with low level cases of disenfranchisement and electoral rigging. The results are contested by the losing candidate and the Supreme Court after presiding over the case gives a ruling in favour of the winning candidate. In view of the limited or lack of evidence of fraud, the international community led by ECOWAS through His Excellency Blaise Compaore, President of Burkina Faso and official mediator of the Guinean political crisis prevails over the losing candidate to accept the results. The defence and security forces remain united and are able to contain pockets of resistance and demonstrations and the loser accepts the verdict of the elections in the interest of national peace and unity. The new President is sworn in and an inclusive government is formed reaching out to the opposition party in a reconciliatory gesture.

3. Best Case Scenario: (*less likely*)

The election is held on 7th November with a low level of reported cases of disenfranchisement and electoral rigging. One candidate wins with a wide margin and the losing candidate accepts the result in spite of pressure from supporters to contest it. The winning candidate makes a tactical overture by offering his opponent "milky cows" positions in the government not in the sense of power-sharing but reconciliation. There is international support in mediating the process of an inclusive government and a civilian government is put in place.

3.0. RECOMMENDED OPTIONS FOR RESPONSE:

In view of the above scenarios, the policy brief proposes the following recommendation for response to critical stakeholders in order to prevent the country from being engulfed by violence fuelled by ethnic animosity and political opportunism.

a). To the International Community notably ECOWAS

ECOWAS the West African Regional Body under the leadership of President Blaise Compaore in his capacity as the mediator of the Guinean crisis should lead the International Community particularly the International Contact Group on Guinea to explore the possibility of negotiating with the contending candidates to accept the results of the election. The Mediation process should take into consideration the formation of an inclusive government so as to bridge the yawning ethnic divide in the country.

The International Community under the leadership of ECOWAS should be putting in place a standby force in readiness to intervene in Guinea as part of its principle to protect civilians against wanton human rights abuses perpetrated by the security agencies in tandem with politicians.

The International Community, especially the ECOWAS Commission, should not fail to deploy a good number of election observers on 7th November to serve as deterrence against any attempt at systematic electoral fraud and as reassurance to the Guinean populace that the world is watching closely.

b). To the Presidential Candidates

The two contending candidates should hold joint-public television programme calling for a violence-free election and unified Guinea on a daily basis up to the Election Day as a model for their supporters to follow.

The losing candidate should accept the results of the ballots of the Guinean people and congratulate the winner and the winner should celebrate the victory moderately mindful of the feelings of others.

c). To the Military Regime

The military regime should maintain its impartiality and refrain from the use of excessive force in enforcing peace and order.

Deployment of security agents at polling stations should be adequate but not overbearing so as not to intimidate voters

d). To Guinean Civil Society

Guinean Civil Society, especially traditional and religious leaders with the support of NGOs, should intensify their campaign of unity and peace above parochial and ethnic interests.

Guinean women groups have a key role as mothers, wives, sisters, pressure groups, to urge the political actors and their supporters who are mainly men to preserve the peace and stability of the country. The women should mobilise and ensure that their voices and positions are heard and considered.

4.0. CONCLUSION

The Guinean presidential election has assumed a “win or die” contest with serious ramifications for the unity and stability of the country. The Presidential contest in the run-off is going to be keen and voter turnout is expected to be high given that provision has been made for displaced persons to vote wherever they are. The ethnic divide is increasing, which does not augur well for the democratic rule coming to Guinea for the first time in its 52 years of independence. It is imperative for all to ensure that the country stays peaceful and stable against all the odds. There is a need for a broad-base inclusive government as a way of bridging the yawning ethnic divide.

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