

Guinea: Change on Hold

I. OVERVIEW

Ten months after the popular uprising against President Lansana Conté and more than a half year after a new government was formed, Guinea's stability is as fragile as ever. The honeymoon of Prime Minister Lansana Kouyaté, the ex-diplomat entrusted with producing "change", is over. The movement that brought him to office is deeply fragmented, creating opportunities for Conté and his clan to regain control. To prevent more bloodshed and counter-revolution, Kouyaté urgently needs to demonstrate that he means to work for a democratic and peaceful transition, and he needs help, especially from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), donors and the two states, the U.S. and France, with ties to the unreformed army.

The protestors in the streets in January and February 2007 (between 137 and 183 died; over 1,500 were wounded) demanded radical change and felt they had won a significant victory when Conté agreed to name an independent prime minister, who would pick his own government. But the mood today is grim. Although inflation has slowed, initial enthusiasm has been replaced with doubt over the capabilities and will of the new government to break with the Conté system and alleviate daily economic difficulties.

It is premature to judge Kouyaté a failure but he has yet to send strong signals that his way of governing is a real break with the past. The Conté clan and its supporters have not accepted their defeat and are manoeuvring to regain full power, not least by playing on popular disappointments to provoke divisions between the actors in the "February revolution": trade unions, civil society organisations and opposition parties. It is Conté, however, who remains the prime obstacle to improvement in the lives of Guineans. The agreement that ended the February crisis left him as the constitutional leader; he must sign all decrees and can and does easily stall government action. Kouyaté's office does not exist in the constitution, and he has only the powers the president delegates.

Free, fair and transparent legislative elections are needed within the next six months to begin the true process of dismantling the Conté system by democratic means. In

the meantime, however, Kouyaté, democratic forces and the international community need to take a number of steps in order to revive the dynamic of change:

- ❑ Kouyaté should broaden his government's base by setting up a national dialogue with the trade unions, civil society and parties so as to agree on the reform agenda and exert collective pressure on Conté to comply with the letter and spirit of the agreement he signed on 27 January 2007.
- ❑ Kouyaté should restructure the cabinet, appoint staff solely for competence, operate transparently, including responding to allegations that challenge the government's integrity, and launch an information campaign to explain his emergency program, including what can and cannot be achieved in the short run.
- ❑ To begin to end impunity, the government should make necessary resources available to the independent commission of inquiry on the violence during the strikes of June 2006 and January-February 2007, including a mixed brigade of police and gendarmerie and technical support from the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. It should also set an early date for the visit of the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, planned since March 2007.
- ❑ To contain the danger the army represents, the government should open a dialogue with it on security sector reform; urgently evaluate training and material needs of the police and gendarmerie so they can maintain order without more killings of unarmed civilians in the event of new mass demonstrations; and ask ECOWAS for police and gendarmerie to support the mixed brigade for the commission of inquiry and a military mission to observe Guinean security forces during elections.
- ❑ France and the U.S., within existing cooperation agreements with Guinean security forces, should support the training and equipment of police and gendarmerie to enhance their capacity to maintain order without recourse to lethal force.

- Donors should fulfil their pledges made at the July 2007 forum for Guinea's partners; provide additional funding to help prepare the elections; and support the government's appeal to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for reliable financing during the 2007-2010 period.

Without such measures, Guinea's crisis is likely to return, quite possibly in the form of less orderly demonstrations than early in the year, which could easily tip the country back into violence and set the stage for restoration of the discredited Conté regime or a coup.

II. INTERIM ASSESSMENT OF THE KOUYATÉ GOVERNMENT

A. THE EMERGENCE OF LANSANA KOUYATÉ AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF THE RECOVERY STRATEGY

1. An apparently exemplary outcome

In the face of an uprising which had become uncontrollable, Lansana Conté declared a state of emergency and implemented martial law, giving full powers to the army which was able to perform acts of extortion on civilians, including in private homes.¹ Intervention by ECOWAS was required and the President of the Commission, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, and the former Nigerian head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida, rushed to Conakry to convince Conté to appoint a prime minister who would be accepted by the angry population.

On 26 February the president finally appointed a "consensus" prime minister: Lansana Kouyaté, chosen from a list put forward jointly by the trade unions and the National Council for Civil Society Organisations (Conseil national des organisations de la société civile de Guinée, CNOSCG). For the first time Guineans felt that they had forced their president to fold through the strength of their mobilisation and the sacrifice of at least 137 of their fellow citizens according to an official report, a number disputed by civil society organisations (183 dead according to CNOSCG's report). The outcome of the crisis,

¹ For a description and analysis of the strike movement and uprising in January and February 2007, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°121, *Guinea: Change or Chaos*, 14 February 2007. For a description of the serious human rights violations committed, particularly by Guinea's security forces, before and during the state of emergency, see "Guinea: Dying for Change", Human Rights Watch, April 2007; and "Guinea: soldiers were shooting everywhere", Amnesty International, 27 June 2007.

the appointment of a head of government from a list put forward by those involved in the social movement, looked like an exemplary victory for the people over a totally discredited power – a real revolution.

In the subsequent euphoria of victory, Kouyaté was welcomed to Conakry on arrival from Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) the day after his appointment. An experienced diplomat who had served in Egypt, at the UN in New York, in Abuja (Nigeria) as Executive Secretary of ECOWAS and finally in Côte d'Ivoire for the International Organisation of French-speaking Communities (Organisation internationale de la francophonie, OIF), among others, Kouyaté appeared to have the prime ministerial profile required by the agreement of 27 January: "A competent senior civil servant with integrity and no either close or distant involvement in embezzlement".²

Although some observers questioned the transparency of the selection process of those put forward by the unions and the CNOSCG and the determining factors in the final choice of Kouyaté, the latter's appointment was widely hailed in the country.³ But it was also clear that the popularity of the new head of government, expressed in the streets of Conakry for several weeks every time his retinue passed by, was not connected to Kouyaté's personality, about which little was known in reality (he had not lived in the country for many years and had not played a role in ending the popular uprising either) but rather because he was perceived as being the person the people had imposed on Conté to lead the infamous "change", the revolt's slogan.

For the population at the end of the crisis, Guinea now had a president who was weakened, not only because of his age, illness and the wear and tear of power, but above all because of a massive rejection of his regime's people and practices. The country had a proper new leader, the prime minister, who had popular legitimacy and who must, like a messiah, solve the country's social and economic problems.⁴ To illustrate this irrational expectation which might pose serious dangers for Kouyaté, some young people cried on the day he arrived at Conakry airport that "a real leader has arrived, the price of a bag of rice is going to fall".

² See the "Minutes of Negotiations following the general strike which was started on 10 January 2007 by the Inter-Trade Union Confederation CNTG -USTG and then broadened to include the ONSLG and the UDTG", Appendix C of Crisis Group Report, *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.

³ Crisis Group interviews, journalists and diplomats, Conakry, July 2007.

⁴ For a description of Guinea's political, economic and social situation since 2003, see Crisis Group Africa Reports N°74, *Guinea: Uncertainties at the End of an Era*, 19 December 2003; N°94, *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, 14 June 2005; *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.; and Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°37, *Guinea in Transition*, 11 April 2006.

It was highly improbable that inflation and the other evils of the Guinean economy would be curbed in a few weeks or months, whatever the qualities and desire of the new head of government. However, this clamour nevertheless clearly demonstrated the people's priority in February 2007 and remains the same today: a fall in or maintenance at accessible levels of the cost of basic products, including first and foremost rice, the country's basic foodstuff. Kouyaté said that he understood the extent of the hope created by his emergence in Guinean public life. He also really wanted the post, maybe more than the other people included on the list of candidates.⁵ He could not ignore the extraordinary difficulty of the task and the responsibility he had just accepted.

2. The initial mistakes and misunderstandings of the recovery strategy

The union leaders who led the last phase of negotiations with representatives of the outgoing government concentrated solely on the question of the appointment of a prime minister who matched the profile described in the agreement of 27 January 2007 with the authority of a "head of government" wholly responsible for his team. The dismissal of Eugène Camara, whose appointment had inflamed the entire country on 9 February, and his replacement by a neutral figure approved by the unions was enough to lift the general strike.

The appointment of a new prime minister through the delegation of President Conté's powers, even when accompanied by a statement of purpose and a decree establishing the head of government's powers, was in reality a modest result, given the extent of the uprising against Conté's regime and the number of demonstrators killed. Union leaders abruptly found themselves leading a movement which was no longer social in nature but political since it was now about negotiating the terms of a radical change in the political and economic governance of the country. They were not yet prepared to play that role.

Despite their weakness and numerous faults, the opposition political parties should and could have played a role, specifically in the final phase of negotiations, which would have complemented union action. The union negotiators should have listened to those in opposition who were insisting on the imperative of an immediate constitutional guarantee of the prime minister's powers, for example.⁶

Without a constitutional basis, the new prime minister's powers remained fragile. The statement of purpose drawn up by the union representatives and approved by the president, which lists up to fourteen objectives for the head of government ranging from "consolidation of national unity and keeping the peace", "protecting the environment and the ecosystem" and "strengthening democracy and the rule of law" to "improving governance", dealt with everything and nothing.

The way the recovery strategy was handled in February meant that a substantial amount of uncertainty over the new head of government's margin for manoeuvre lingered. It did nothing to guard against likely misunderstandings between those involved in the "change" movement and the prime minister they had chosen as regards the direction the latter should take. Nevertheless, even without constitutional powers Kouyaté had to incarnate a profound break with the regime. The swift organisation of a national dialogue, bringing together particular representatives from civil society (including unionists), political parties and religious leaders, in the wake of the events was indispensable.⁷ Such an initiative would have given Kouyaté real legitimacy but not exclusive responsibility for the political and economic choices which needed to be taken to achieve the radical change of governance the population expected.

B. FROM HONEYMOON TO DISILLUSIONMENT

In July 2007 from Conakry to Labé and Kankan to N'Zérékoré, a feeling of doubt and uncertainty had already replaced the euphoria of change, and abruptly ended the state of grace Lansana Kouyaté had enjoyed since his appointment on 21 February 2007 and the formation of his government on 28 March.⁸ The Kouyaté team had only just completed its first three months, which was not enough time to make a proper judgement. Between March and July the prime minister had essentially formed his government, made a few strong speeches punctuated by promises of quick, concrete results in terms of improving basic public services (water and electricity), travelled overseas on several occasions to seek funding (Paris, Brussels, New York, Washington, Tripoli), named new prefects and governors (on 22 June) and prepared an emergency government program presented to Guinea's external partners on 25 July in Paris.

⁵ Crisis Group interviews, diplomatic source and civil society representatives, Conakry, July 2007.

⁶ This was particularly true of the former Prime Minister Sidya Touré, President of the Union of Republican Forces (L'Union des forces républicaines, UFR) opposition party who gave several interviews during the crisis. See "Interview exclusive

de M. Sidya Touré, ancien Premier ministre, président de l'UFR", 26 January 2007, www.aminata.com.

⁷ See the recommendations made in Crisis Group Report, *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.

⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Conakry, Kissidougou, N'Zérékoré, Kankan and Labé, July 2007.

The contrast between the slow and laborious setting up of the new government and the immensity of Guineans' expectations provoked lively criticism from those involved in the change movement themselves. In a vitriolic open letter to the prime minister on 3 July 2007, the leaders of the union federations accused the government of not respecting the formal agreement of 27 January and criticised the prime minister's firm promises (particularly as regards improvement of the electricity and water supply), the appointments of the leaders of the central bank and particularly the appointments of prefects and governors which had been made, according to union leaders, on the basis of "kinship" and not competence.⁹

In the context of the first few months, the prime minister particularly needed to convince the people of his determination to initiate the expected change, essentially through the choice of a governmental team and senior civil servants. Guineans wanted an entirely new government with people who had not served at the top of the Conté regime. Kouyaté satisfied this requirement by appointing men and women who had never held ministerial posts. However, the formation of the government in March 2007 was not welcomed with great enthusiasm by Conakry's opinion leaders.

In reality, some of the new ministers had held important posts in ministries or other public institutions condemned for bad management (particularly the Central Bank). The government team is also judged to be very unequal in terms of quality.¹⁰ However, it should be recognised that it was particularly difficult to reconcile the demand for new figures with the requirement of experience in running public affairs which would have allowed them to take the measure of their departments more quickly. But the real problem for Kouyaté's ministers is that, at the beginning of November 2007, they still did not have their own cabinets; President Conté had decided to ignore the draft decree on restructuring ministerial cabinets submitted for his signature by the head of government.

The choice of the senior managers of the national administration, the regional governors and prefects, led to the greatest criticism of Kouyaté. Yes, the prime minister has managed to almost entirely replace all the State's representatives in the country's different regions. But two things immediately caused opinion leaders and the population to have reservations: the choice of certain

managers who were known for their strong allegiance to the Conté regime, given their former positions (particularly within the interior ministry which ran all the fraudulent elections of the past few years to Conté's benefit); and the perception of an "ethnic imbalance" in the new appointments to the benefit of Kouyaté's native region (and that of his interior and security ministers): the plain of Upper Guinea, largely populated by the Maninka ethnic group.

This criticism was systematically raised in private interviews between Crisis Group and representatives from civil society, political leaders and more anonymous citizens.¹¹ These appointments have had a notable negative impact on the prime minister's popularity, probably because they are combined with the government's slow start, the priority he gave to overseas missions until July, the absence of consultations with increasingly suspicious opinion leaders and his refusal to acknowledge signs that President Conté and his entourage have been obstructing his work.

Kouyaté could not ignore the sensitivity of the ethnic issue in Guinea where every series of managerial appointments is initially examined on the basis of the actual or supposed ethnic origin of those being promoted.¹² At the National Assembly on 11 October Kouyaté finally reacted to the accusations of ethnocentrism and contested the "ethnic counting" being advanced by public opinion (seventeen new Maninka prefects out of a total of 33). He explained that there were "eight prefects and two governors from Lower Guinea, seven prefects and one governor from Middle Guinea, eight prefects and three governors from Upper Guinea (his native region) and ten prefects and two governors from Forest Guinea".¹³ He also remarked that there were seven Fulbe in his government and only three Maninkas and that no one reproached him for

⁹ Inter-Trade Union Confederation CNTG-USTG broadened to include ONSLG and UDTG. Open letter to the prime minister, signed by Hadja Rabiataou Serah Diallo (CNTG), Louis M'Bemba Soumah (USTG), Fatoumata Diakité (ONSLG) and Abdoulaye Baldé, UDTG, 3 July 2007.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, civil society representatives and diplomats, Conakry, July 2007.

¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, Conakry, Kissidougou, N'Zérékoré, Kankan and Labé, 3-20 July 2007.

¹² Respect for a strict balance between the large ethnic groups (the Maninkas from Upper Guinea, the Fulas or Fulbe from Middle Guinea, the Sosso from the Basse Côte lowlands and the various ethnic groups in Forest Guinea) upon each new appointment is certainly not the best way to guarantee both equal access for citizens to high level public administration and the competence of the latter. But in the absence of institutional methods for managing diversity accepted by all and given the country's fragile political context, it is still imprudent and tactless to appear to favour one's own ethnic group in appointments. The ethnic solidarity impulse is undeniable. Most Maninkas Crisis Group spoke to tended to criticise Kouyaté less than others; among these others, Fulbe living in Conakry or Labé were most sensitive to the "ethnocentrism" of which the prime minister is accused.

¹³ "L'ethnocentrisme fait débat au parlement: 'J'ai plus de ministres peul que malinké!' said Lansana Kouyaté", 12 October 2007, www.guineenews.org.

that.¹⁴ Kouyaté should not have waited to be questioned in parliament to explain to his compatriots his decisions and the criteria used to choose the men and women surrounding him.

Most representatives from Guinean civil society freely recognise that, however much he wanted to, no prime minister could solve the enormous economic, political and social problems which had accumulated over several years of chaos, incompetence and disregard for the general good in three or six months. For example, it was impossible for any government to implement perceptible improvements to the water and electricity supply in a few weeks, given the serious structural problems in the public companies concerned, the widespread fraud within these companies, the animosity of the managers who have run them for years and the inexistence of the public resources needed to make indispensable investments in these sectors.

Kouyaté's mistake in this regard was not therefore breaching the commitments made before citizens but rather taking the risk of making them and setting deadlines. Given the exceptional circumstances in which he was appointed, Kouyaté could and should have shown some convincing signs of breaking with the Conté regime too.

C. REPAIRING THE DAMAGE?

1. The promises of the government's emergency program

The Kouyaté government is cruelly lacking in time. The prime minister could claim to retain his position for the next three years until the end of President Conté's constitutional mandate in December 2010. In the Guinean political system, a new parliament does not necessarily have an impact on the composition of the executive and, as highlighted above, the prime minister does not exist in the constitution and only has powers delegated by the president. Kouyaté could therefore remain head of government following the legislative elections. But such is the uncertainty, it is impossible today to look beyond the very short term.

The unhappiness of part of the population, disappointed by not seeing a significant improvement in its living conditions, denigration campaigns targeting Kouyaté and ongoing increased tension between the prime minister and the president are some of the reasons for questioning how long this "government of change" can last. However, since August the government seems to have entered a second phase which should allow it to post a few results and possibly recover some popularity.

The government has drawn up an emergency program consisting of priority action to be implemented in six months (July to December 2007). The program has three main objectives: "returning hope to the people by giving a concrete response to their most important expectations on social and governance issues", "consolidating the rule of law by strengthening political and social dialogue and holding consensual and reliable legislative elections" and "creating the basis for a return to development in the country through the standard planning mechanisms".¹⁵

Among the many proposals for action foreseen in this ambitious emergency program, the following in particular are worthy of mention: organisation of legislative elections with the preparation of identity and ballot cards with photographs and effective revision of the electoral roll; renovation and equipping of public infrastructures destroyed during the demonstrations in January and February 2007; constitution by the state of secure stocks of basic foodstuffs; improvement of access to water and electricity through renovation of equipment and new investment; consolidation of public transport in Conakry (purchase of 100 buses); finalisation of public administration management audits; and a review of the agreements and conventions governing the operation of mining resources.

Presented by the minister for the economy, finance and planning, Ousmane Doré, the government's emergency program was welcomed by Guinea's external partners who met in Paris on 25 July 2007. The forum, organised jointly by the European Commission and the World Bank, also studied the medium-term economic prospects presented in the 2007-2010 poverty reduction strategy document (DSRP II in World Bank jargon). To aid implementation of the emergency program considered to cost \$123 million (including \$45 million already raised by the Guinean government), the partners pledged to allocate additional funds worth more than \$50 million and re-assign resources already committed to existing projects worth more than \$40 million.¹⁶

The government therefore finally has a financial margin for manoeuvre to embark on action with perceptible results for the population. The real restriction remains the fossilised and unmotivated public administration on which ministers must rely. As well as now being able to commit himself to the profound public sector reform Guinea needs, Kouyaté must urgently surround himself with a competent team and oversee the restructuring of ministerial cabinets, with or without the support of Conté. As regards the economy

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Programme d'actions prioritaires pour la consolidation de la paix et la relance du développement économique et social", a provisional document consulted by Crisis Group, Conakry, July 2007.

¹⁶ Press release following the forum for Guinea's partners, the World Bank and the European Commission, 25 July 2007.

in the medium term, establishing a formal program with the IMF, which would enable Guinea to benefit from considerably lighter external debt, is an essential requirement.¹⁷

Closer relations between the government and external debt sponsors, a review of mining contracts by an inter-ministerial committee or the launch of various public administration audits were not enough to reassure a population worried about the conditions under which they were going to experience the Muslim month of fasting (from mid-September to mid-October). The start of the month of Ramadan was therefore marked by relatively large demonstrations criticising the high price of basic foodstuffs, particularly in the most sensitive outlying districts of Conakry, Hamdallaye, Bambéto and Cosa.¹⁸ The government had announced the exceptional import of tons of rice, sugar and oil for the month of Ramadan, but it took time to put the mechanism in place. Foodstuffs imported by the government arrived at sales points managed by district leaders.¹⁹ Each family could then buy one (and only one) bag of rice weighing 50kg for 85,000 Guinean francs (about \$20) against 115,000 to 128,000 at the markets (\$27 to \$30).²⁰

Although this administered sale brought families temporary relief during the Muslim month of fasting, it does not appear to constitute a response to the crucial problem of monitoring prices, connected both to the management of the Guinean currency and more specifically to the structure of the import and distribution networks of products like rice. The good news for the Kouyaté government since September has probably been the improvement in the supply of electricity and water in the capital, another determining factor in deciding the people's mood.²¹

However, it is too early to know whether this progress is a result of the initial efforts made by the national electricity company (Electricité de Guinée) on the impetus of the government after original promises were not kept, or the mechanical effect of the wet season on electricity production. But there is no doubt that the government should take credit for the progress made in the solar energy public lighting project on two large routes in the suburbs of Conakry.²²

2. The resumption of dialogue with social and political representatives

The relationship of trust between those who led the general strike in January and February and the prime minister did not survive the first three months of Kouyaté's management. Tension peaked in July following the appointment of prefects and governors when union leaders publicly criticised the head of government. Cracks within the union movement also appeared at that time, particularly between the branch led by Rabiadou Serah Diallo from the CNTG federation, which was unrelenting about the insufficient action taken by Kouyaté, and the branch led by Ibrahima Fofana from the USTG federation, which was more accommodating as regards the government. However, extensive internal union meetings led to a drop in tension and minimal cohesion was maintained.

Since August Kouyaté has resumed dialogue with representatives from society, the unions and the National Council of Civil Society Organisations (Conseil national des organisations de la société civile de Guinée, CNOSCG), thereby avoiding further public criticisms from civil society whose support is vital for the government's survival. During a meeting of civil society on 4 September, the spokesperson of the Inter-Trade Union Confederation CNTG/USTG criticised "regressive forces opposed to change which are acting and working ceaselessly to undermine the implementation of restorative measures to ensure the happiness of the people" and called on the unions, civil society and the country's spirited forces to "assume their responsibilities to save the country by perpetuating the change achieved at enormous human and material cost".²³

Unionists have also demanded "respect for and scrupulous application of" the formal agreement signed at the end of January. Representatives from civil society are perplexed and a few are disoriented. They are questioning their credibility with the population and, consequently, with the international community which has possibly expected too much from them since the January-February movement.

¹⁷ External debt is estimated at \$3 billion, or 100 per cent of GDP. If economic and financial reforms are made in the framework of a formal agreement with the IMF and the World Bank over the period from 2007 to 2010, Guinea could eventually benefit from the deletion of two thirds of its debt. See "Mission FMI-Banque mondiale, le program à portée de main", *Le Diplomate*, 11 October 2007.

¹⁸ "Flambée des prix : le carrefour de Bambéto en ébullition", 18 September 2007, www.guineenews.org; and "Hamdallaye, Bambéto et Cosa : on manifeste contre la cherté des prix", *Le Diplomate*, 18 September 2007.

¹⁹ As was to be expected, some local authorities were accused of selling part of the bags of rice to traders who then sold them at market price, "Le riz importé par le gouvernement guinéen pour soulager la population n'échappe pas à la speculation", Agence de presse africaine (APA), 27 September 2007.

²⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, Guinean journalist, Dakar, 4 October 2007.

²¹ "Conakry : le courant, de plus en plus courant", 25 September 2007, www.guineenews.org.

²² Crisis Group telephone interviews, Dakar, 4 October 2007. See also "le projet d'éclairage solaire public avance", 11 September 2007, www.guineeconakry.info.

²³ "Les syndicats dénoncent des 'rétrogrades opposés au changement'", Agence France-Presse, 4 September 2007.

They are also worried about their ability to control the crowds if a new uprising should occur.²⁴

The government also resumed dialogue with political parties who had been forgotten to some extent, both by civil society representatives and the prime minister, in the first few months. The date and organisational conditions of the legislative elections, delayed from June to December 2007, unsurprisingly constitute a major concern for the leaders of the political parties. Many opposition parties, including Sidya Touré's Union for Republican Forces (UFR), expressed doubts about the desire of the Kouyaté government to guarantee the administration's neutrality in terms of the election, following the controversial appointments of prefects and governors.²⁵

The meetings between Kouyaté and political parties and the start of regular meetings between the latter and the interior minister, Mamadou Beau Keita, have not eradicated the mistrust. But they have at least launched the very first stage of the electoral process: the appointment of members of the Independent National Electoral Commission, CENI (Commission électorale nationale indépendante) which must organise the elections jointly with the ministry of the interior. However, the CENI had still not been set up at the start of November as the opposition political parties were having enormous difficulties in reaching agreement about their representatives therein, proof that suspicion is also the rule of thumb between the various political parties.

The legislative elections, which can and must constitute an essential step in consolidating a democratic transition in Guinea, will not be organised in December. CENI will probably not be operational before the end of November. The equipment needed for taking a census of the electorate and providing it with ballot cards with photographs will not be available before December, thereby also pushing back the review of the electoral lists.²⁶ The Trust Fund, implemented by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to support the electoral process and worth 7,120,000 euros, will enable the first operations to be launched but funding for the electoral process as a whole is far from being settled.²⁷ In these conditions, the elections could at best only be held at the end of the first quarter of 2008. Again, Guinea will have to quietly go on with life throughout the long months which separate it from political change.

²⁴ Crisis Group round table with civil society representatives, Conakry, 29 August 2007.

²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, opposition party leaders, Conakry, July 2007.

²⁶ "Législatives prochaines, report probable du scrutin : Bö Keita donne des explications techniques", 7 September 2007, www.guineenews.org.

²⁷ "Élections législatives : le comité de pilotage tient sa première réunion", 20 September 2007, www.guineenews.org.

III. ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTÉ SYSTEM

A. THE TACTICAL WITHDRAWAL OF A WEAKENED PRESIDENT

Those in power had not understood what was happening at all. They didn't see that it wasn't a movement like the other strikes in June and March last year. They never questioned themselves. It completely passed President Conté by. He then developed in his position under the influence of his wife, Henriette, who called for calm. Conté is a soldier and reacted as one: there are factions, they must be circumvented and subdued. He can't envisage losing. He signed a decree appointing a prime minister but deep down he is still the president with all his powers.²⁸

These comments made to Crisis Group perfectly illustrate the state of mind of the clan in power during the demonstrations and that of their leader, Lansana Conté. When unionists submitted their proposals to end the crisis to the president at the start of the general strike, demanding "the implementation of a broad consensus government, led by a prime minister as head of government" to allow the head of state to "retire to better look after his health", Conté, entrenched in one of the military camps in Conakry, could only reply with a direct threat to the union leaders who had come to meet him: "I am going to kill you all, I am a soldier, I have already killed people".²⁹ After a bloody day of demonstrating on 22 January, the president, finally aware that the survival of his system of power was at stake, showed that he was perfectly lucid by calling on his army, his real defence, to stay united.

Conté had long since lost the taste for managing the affairs of his country and did not really hide the fact. But he could not accept that people dared ask him to "retire" before the end of his third constitutional mandate (in 2010) and after 23 years as Guinea's leader. He saw the union demands as a personal humiliation, as he did the spontaneous and overwhelming rejection of his first choice for the post of prime minister, Eugène Camara, and the intervention of ECOWAS which led him to agree to appoint another head of government from the list put forward by the very people who were defying his authority.

"There is no open transition. I am the boss; the others are my subordinates....Neither the unions nor any foreign bodies forced me to appoint a prime minister....The day he (the prime minister) no longer makes the country happy,

²⁸ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Conakry, 20 July 2007.

²⁹ Crisis Group Report, *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.

he'll go".³⁰ President Conté made these remarks in an interview granted to the foreign press in June, three months after the appointment of Kouyaté. For him, nothing has changed since the bloody events at the start of the year. He quickly reverted to his old habits, such as crossing Conakry to visit his friend and financial partner Mamadou Sylla, the controversial businessman who he freed from prison in December 2006 which triggered the general strike in January 2007.³¹

Faced with his prime minister, Conté knows that he has the constitutional legitimacy of the elected head of state (certainly after several electoral deceptions), the powerful instrument of decree (since no one thought to take away the power to sign all decrees submitted to him by the head of government)³² and the support of the armed forces for which he assumes supreme command.³³ In these conditions he was able to declare in the same interview that "it is a good thing to have a prime minister to take the blows instead of the president". That is exactly what happened in Guinea eight months after Kouyaté's arrival in office.

Conté has an extraordinary ability to provoke a certain amount of indulgence from Guineans, despite his catastrophic record as the country's leader. Whether it be his corrupt regime, the country's economic bankruptcy or serious human rights violations, Conté always manages to transfer the responsibility in the minds of his fellow citizens to his ministers, administration, advisers, family, military chiefs, courtesans, etc. With his apparent bonhomie, ease, generosity (with public money) and flagrant disregard for the rules which govern the exercise of the presidential function everywhere else, Conté assumes his irresponsibility so well that he has ended up convincing many of his fellow citizens that one can be both head of state and completely irresponsible.

³⁰ "Je suis le chef, les autres sont mes subordonnés", affirme le président Conté" confirms President Conté", Agence France-Presse, 15 June 2007.

³¹ Crisis Group Report, *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.

³² According to the decree on the prime minister's powers and in conformity with the desire to make him the real head of government, the latter appoints civil posts. But no mention has been made of the power of decree which amounts to letting the head of state alone sign all decrees, including those for the appointments of civil and military posts.

³³ The decree on the prime minister's powers does not grant him the power to appoint military posts. The prime minister can only have an influence on the armed forces through the management of the budget of the defence ministry, which cannot totally avoid the grip of the finance ministry.

B. THE SECURITY FORCES: BETWEEN LOYALTY, CRIMINALITY AND MALAISE

The events of January and February 2007 provided at least two clarifications and allowed one conclusion to be drawn about the security forces. Despite their internal divisions, they are effectively controlled by President Conté and are loyal to him, whatever the reasons for their loyalty. Their capacity for repression cannot be underestimated. Statements collected by various human rights organisations are damning, both for the military and police hierarchy and those deployed on the ground. The security forces represent de facto the most serious threat to political change in Guinea and the lives of the people.

During the weeks of the crisis, Guineans wondered if the army would end up doing what civilians could not through their enormous demonstrations: depose President Conté to put the country in order. Many dreamed of a coup by the "young officers" who did not benefit from payments by the regime as much as the old officers and the Sosso officers close to the president did, and who should also be sensitive to the demand for political change made by the civilian population. Others thought that a coup could also germinate in the minds of high command close to the president: the then army commander-in-chief, General Kerfalla Camara (who died of natural causes on 10 September 2007 in Paris) or his deputy at the time, General Arafan Camara. They could have then assumed the role of liberators and guaranteed themselves a safe future after Conté.

Crisis Group has always supported the view that the hope of many Guineans for a coup d'état "in the Mauritania style" to begin a new chapter after Conté was both a dream and an extremely risky easy solution.³⁴ However, the coup d'état never seemed as close as during the fiercest of the demonstrations and the repression. For several hours shots fired within one of the military camps in Conakry gave the impression that soldiers had decided to revolt. It appeared that they were unhappier about their pay than the repression affecting the civilians. There was no coup d'état against Conté, although there is no confirmation that such a step was not attempted.³⁵

³⁴ In Mauritania, a military junta led by Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall overturned the autocrat Maaouiya Ould Taya in August 2005, carried out political reforms and respected his commitment to return power to civilians at the end of a transition period sanctioned by elections. See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°53, *Political Transition in Mauritania: Results and Prospects*, 24 April 2006. Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi won the presidential election in March 2007.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, diplomatic source and a military source, Conakry, 6 and 20 July 2007.

It was not just down to luck that Conté avoided being overthrown from within the ranks of his army when he was being shouted down by the population. The president had rediscovered his old military reflexes. Installed in the military camp, he knew enough to keep an eye on his commander-in-chief and called upon his men to stay united in adversity, another way of making the soldiers understand that it was in their interests to support a president who was a member of the “family”, rather than ally themselves with civilians who were demanding a change which would threaten the army’s subsequent influence in the country. According to several sources, Conté often repeats to his soldiers, particularly the presidential guard, that power would fall into their hands when he was no longer there, a message which encourages loyalty.³⁶

The men in uniform were not content with remaining loyal to their boss. They ferociously repressed the demonstrators. Not all soldiers fired on them, not all police officers fired on them and not all gendarmes fired on them. But the variety of circumstances in which the security services attacked dozens of people and the variety of units involved are frightening, as statements collected by human rights organisations attest.³⁷

Between 137 and 183 people were killed and more than 1,500 others injured because each member of the security forces with a gun and ammunition could in the end choose to shoot to kill unarmed demonstrators, whether he received an order to do so or not; or because “recruitment was very badly handled” and some soldiers preferred to “shoot everywhere”, in many cases mowing down civilians in their homes.³⁸ When the soldiers revolted in May 2007, this time against their hierarchy to demand payment of their overdue salaries, they again unleashed their guns, supposedly shooting into the air but at least eight civilians were killed by stray bullets.

According to statements on the events in January and February 2007 collected by Amnesty International, “members of the security forces who fired during this period essentially came from the presidential guard (called the Red Berets), a unit of the army under the authority of the army commander-in-chief and based at the presidency, the gendarmerie, under the authority of the defence ministry, and members of the Mobile Intervention and Security Company (Compagnie mobile d’intervention et de sécurité, CMIS), a police force under the authority of the security

ministry. Inside the country civilians, known as ‘Volunteers’ but armed and wearing military uniforms, also participated in the repression”.³⁹

Most of the people directly or indirectly responsible for the excessive use of force against unarmed civilians are still in their posts and enjoy total impunity.⁴⁰ One of them, the army commander-in-chief during the strike, General Kerfalla Camara, has died but the other officers still command the Guinean army, although President Conté has introduced changes at the defence ministry and high command following the military revolt in May, essentially to return order and protect himself from a bad shock from his brothers in arms.⁴¹

The denial of the seriousness of the crimes committed by the security forces at the start of the year foreshadows the enormous challenge facing the National Inquiry Commission established to shed light on these events and prosecute those responsible. It also reveals the overwhelming need to consider how to reform the Guinean security forces as soon as possible and the extraordinary difficulty of doing so. The current defence minister is deeply entrenched in this denial. Supposedly popular with the troops and effective at disciplining the army, General Baïlo Diallo⁴² explained to Crisis Group that the events in January and February were just “momentary problems” and that now “there is no problem between soldiers and civilians”.⁴³

Asked about his availability to cooperate with the national inquiry commission into this violence, the minister welcomed the exclusively national nature of this commission and indicated that he was already fully cooperating with it. However, the commission had still not been formed or established at the time of the interview and was still not

³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, source close to the presidency, November 2006.

³⁷ “Guinea: Dying for change”, Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.*; and “Guinea: soldiers were shooting everywhere”, Amnesty International, *op. cit.*

³⁸ “Guinea: soldiers were shooting everywhere”, Amnesty International, *op. cit.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ By retaining their posts and their freedom to act, those within the security forces responsible for the massacres in January-February can, in particular, threaten and make attempts on the lives of witnesses who could collaborate with the future inquiry commission on these events. It has been established that certain members of the presidential guard have already moved in this direction. Crisis Group interview, Dakar, September 2007.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, diplomatic and military sources, July 2007.

⁴² Abruptly forced into retirement by President Conté at the end of 2005 when generals of the same generation such as Kerfalla Camara remained, General Baïlo Diallo, a Fulbe officer with a strong personality, was named minister of defence to replace General Arafan Camar, former army commander-in-chief, following the military revolt in May 2007. Conté wanted to officially distance himself from generals like Arafan Camara and Kerfalla Camara who were accused by young officers and men in the ranks of badly managing promotions in the army and diverting money promised to the soldiers.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, defence minister, Conakry, 30 August 2007.

operational at the start of November. Contrary to the minister's remarks, the repression at the start of the year created a real divide between the population and its security forces. Messages sent to mobile telephones during the weeks following the crisis asked citizens to show their disregard for men in uniform – they found it difficult to find taxis for example.⁴⁴ The thuggish behaviour of the soldiers, such as pillaging shops during their change of mood in May, further discredited the army.⁴⁵

This institution is now characterised by a dual malaise: an internal malaise connected to the recurrent late payment of salaries and unequal promotions; and a malaise stemming from the disastrous image of soldiers after the repression and the acts of extortion performed by some of them in January and February 2007. Is this malaise strong enough to provoke a different reaction by the security forces in the event of new demonstrations? There is nothing to confirm it one way or the other. But no change in the behaviour of the presidential guard Red Berets should be expected.

C. THE DIGNITARIES AND PROFITEERS OF THE CONTÉ REGIME: BETWEEN FEAR AND RESISTANCE

The various political and business clans which, with the security forces, make up the core of the Conté system were taken by surprise by the popular uprising at the start of the year. There had been warnings with the two general strikes in February and March 2006, but the men and women of power were still not afraid that Guineans, considered to be resigned to the situation, would one day not only heed a call for a general strike lasting several weeks but also come out into the streets in tens of thousands across the country to demand "change". Ministers continued to calmly travel about Conakry in the first few days of the general strike in January 2007 and expected the movement to run out of steam as soon as the government promised to satisfy some of the social demands made by the unions.

Even after the first wave of demonstrations and repression, and the signing of a tripartite agreement (government, unions and employers) on 27 January deciding on the appointment of a prime minister, the regime's dignitaries

had still not really got the message. The state minister for presidential affairs, Eugène Camara, could hardly have imagined therefore that his appointment on 9 February as the new prime minister would have unleashed the fury of Guineans and chaos in the country.⁴⁶

The events did eventually remove all the old ministers since Kouyaté did not return any of them to the government formed on 28 March, one month after his appointment. However, they had time to authorise final suspect payments and maybe pass on some instructions to their collaborators in the ministerial cabinets which are essentially still in place six months later. As shall be seen later, some senior civil servants from the old administration would later find important posts in the new administration, particularly as *département* prefects or regional governors. The radical change of faces at ministerial level has, up to now, been much less radical lower down the scale.

Conté's old ministers regularly meet to, it is thought, organise resistance to change.⁴⁷ They have the means to take significant action: money, men in the ministries, access to the president and those close to him, and the possibility of an objective alliance with the officer clan in the army. The difficulties facing the Kouyaté government and the prime minister's blunders have given them a powerful attacking angle to manipulate opinion and discredit the change camp.

The president's party, the Party for Unity and Progress (Parti de l'unité et du progrès, PUP) is another bastion of Conté power which is wavering between doubt and resistance. For Guineans, the PUP is "the party of administration" which owes its electoral victories to the mobilisation of senior civil servants in Conakry and the regions to organise fraud and decide the result of the vote. The popular uprising in January 2007 destabilised the leaders of the PUP who, again, could never have imagined such action by the Guinean people. The party's MPs demonstrated more restraint than the security forces in their support for Conté during the days of the crisis. When the president asked the National Assembly to vote for a continuation of the state of emergency and martial law, the parliament, although dominated by PUP members, opposed him.

For the first time, MPs played a counter-weight role and challenged the president. However, this was not a sign of the PUP's support for the demands for change made by the population. In a town "where everyone knows everyone" the MPs of the presidential dominion were most fearful

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interviews, journalists and representatives from civil society, July 2007.

⁴⁵ On the night of 12 to 13 May, hundreds of soldiers in trucks knocked down the walls of the shops of the Trade and Financing Company (SCF) belonging to a rich businessman, El Hadj Alpha Amadou Diallo, located in Matam, Conakry, and removed various pieces of merchandise, including soap, rice and vehicles. Civilians then finished the soldiers' pillage. "Guinée : les limogeages n'ont pas suffi à apaiser la colère des militaires", Agence France-Presse, 13 May 2007.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, diplomatic source, Conakry, 20 July 2007.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, journalists, civil society representatives and diplomats, July 2007.

for their material property, and even their physical safety, if they were to vote to extend the exceptional measures which had become unbearable for citizens. Contrary to the soldiers, the PUP MPs live in residential districts in Conakry, not in camps. They knew that they would be the first targets for a possible further outpouring of anger in the street.⁴⁸

Since the formation of the Kouyaté government and following an initial period of discretion, PUP figures have rediscovered their taste for taking the initiative and their fighting spirit. While the party was widely discredited throughout the country following the massive demonstrations against those in power, the leaders organised a retreat (political meeting) and meetings in Conakry to show that the party still existed. Rallying the PUP was even more urgent as it had to fight the legislative elections only a few months after the crisis. Initially planned for June, these elections were then rescheduled for December 2007 and will finally not be held until the end of the first quarter of 2008 at best.

For the first time in the country's political history, transparent and honest elections can be hoped for because they will be organised jointly by a new and theoretically impartial government and an Independent National Electoral Commission which does not take its orders from the presidential camp.⁴⁹

Between flawless loyalty to a stumbling regime, an opportune distancing from that power or rapprochement with the Kouyaté government or opposition parties, influential members of the PUP are wondering about their short-term future. The stakes are very simple: preservation of a style of living which they owe solely to their proximity to power. They have not given up the fight against change. And they can win if social and political figures who say they want change become divided and damage themselves in the struggle for individual positioning.

⁴⁸ Even soldiers had to adapt their behaviour in some places in the face of threats of reprisals towards their families living in civilian districts. This was particularly the case in N'Zérékoré where youth associations did not hesitate to pass on clear messages to the military command about their capacity for violent reprisals. Elsewhere, such as Labé, anonymous leaflets threatening to kill "four family members of soldiers for one civilian killed by a man in uniform" allegedly contributed to the relatively limited amount of repression in this town in Middle Guinea. Crisis Group interviews, Conakry, N'Zérékoré and Labé, July 2007.

⁴⁹ The Independent National Electoral Commission is composed equally of representatives from the presidential dominion and the opposition, as well as representatives from the administration and civil society. See Crisis Group Report, *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.

IV. RESCUING CHANGE

A. THE PRIME MINISTER'S RESPONSIBILITY

1. The political priorities

As indicated in the interview quoted above, Conté uses the prime minister as a shield to take blows in his place. Kouyaté must extract himself from this trap and make major corrections to his method of governance. At stake are the country's stability and, consequently, his own political survival. He must clarify the meaning of his mission and look for the support of his fellow citizens, not by encouraging or tolerating the creation of support clubs and youth movements committed to his cause,⁵⁰ but by telling them the truth and committing himself to concrete action towards change, even if it means risking direct opposition with the president.

Without the clear support of most of the population and opinion leaders (union figures, other representatives from civil society and political figures), Kouyaté has no chance of resisting hostile manoeuvres from a crafty president accustomed to tests of strength and an entourage determined to fight. At the end of September the prime minister publicly admitted for the first time that the president was not making his task easier by dragging his feet over draft decrees submitted for his signature, crucial for government action. It was time to speak the truth, admittedly with diplomatic caution, about the obstruction orchestrated by the head of state. The special circumstances which led to his emergence on the Guinean scene oblige Kouyaté to accept some degree of risk.

In terms of politics, a national dialogue involving all social forces in the country is still indispensable. It could only help the prime minister to re-centre his mission in the spirit of January and February 2007. It must serve to put collective pressure on President Conté and remind him that he must effectively delegate all his powers to the head of government, in the spirit of the agreement of 27 January. A specific mechanism could be adopted so that delays in signing decrees by the president do not hold up government action. Separate dialogues between the government and

⁵⁰ Organisations supporting Kouyaté's action have appeared in Conakry and beyond, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire where he was based before his appointment. (A "Forum of Friends of Lansana Kouyaté for Positive Action" was presented on 23 September). The prime minister is also suspected of wanting to use the new National Council of Guinean Youth as a movement supporting his cause. See "Conseil national des jeunes de Guinée : les raisons de l'échec vues par son secrétaire chargé de la communication", 27 September 2007, www.guineenews.org; and "La rencontre des jeunes dégenère à Dalaba", 7 September 2007, www.guineenews.org

the unions, between the unions, the Council of Civil Society Organisations and employers or between the government and political parties are certainly useful but they do not enable misunderstandings to be overcome and a minimum platform to be established to resist those who oppose change.⁵¹

Such a platform would not be the ideal solution because it will result in a compromise between those who certainly want change but do not define it in the same way, depending on their particular interests. But there will be no miracle in Guinea: change, if it is to be peaceful and civilised, will not be made without the support of a critical number of opinion leaders for a minimal common position about how to reform the country.

The Kouyaté government must also do all it can to convince political figures that it is determined to organise legislative elections under transparent and fair conditions, unknown in a country which has only witnessed more or less flagrant electoral deceptions. The administration's neutrality must be guaranteed, particularly through access by observers from civil society to all stages of the electoral procedure, including at local level of prefectures and sub-prefectures. The authorities must be aware of the change which has already taken place in mentalities following the events at the start of the year: if the elections are openly deceitful, it is almost certain that young people will react violently and will again attack the public buildings which have not even been repaired after their destruction in February.⁵²

To avoid getting to that stage, the interior ministry and CENI must be equal to the stakes of this election: the population must be allowed to express itself through the ballot box and no longer through street demonstrations. If the process of revising the electoral lists starts quickly and the political parties play their role, the election will provoke interest among the population across the country. The legislative elections must be organised as soon as possible, the assembly having reached the end of its mandate in June 2007, but no concessions can be made as regards the quality of this process.

2. Another way of governing

In terms of economic and social policy, the prime minister must devote himself to the priorities of his fellow citizens: prices of basic foodstuffs across the country, then access to water and electricity services in urban areas and the opening up of rural areas and rural infrastructures. The government's

emergency program is promising. Its implementation must be accompanied by simple and honest communication. Kouyaté must explain what his government can do, when it can do it and how. Restructuring the ministries and forming cabinets with new skills, including Guineans from the diaspora, are essential if this government is to be given a chance to succeed.

The possibility of the contractual recruitment of managers at pay levels higher than the current derisory salaries should be envisaged, exceptionally and under totally transparent conditions. Public administration will not be reformed in six months or even a year. But signs of a break with the past must be given by at least enforcing respect for working hours in ministries and introducing a minimum of organisation and stringency.

Kouyaté must also provide proof of his support for the highest standards in terms of reducing the state's rate of expenditure, transparency in managing public money and a strict separation between the private activities of his entourage and his public activities, to distinguish himself from the practices of the Conté clan. Kouyaté must respond to the accusations of wasting public money made by part of the local press rather than remaining silent, something which can only encourage suspicion.⁵³

Kouyaté finally explained himself before the National Assembly in response to an MP on 11 October about the recurrent criticism on what is judged to be the exorbitant cost of renovating his official residence.⁵⁴ Whether the criticisms of his management are made in good or bad faith, the prime minister should respond and make transparency one of the symbols of breaking with the habits of previous governments. This is the price to pay to once again incarnate the hope of change.

3. The struggle against impunity and security

Finally, the prime minister must work to contain the threat stemming from the security forces. The task is extremely delicate, especially because he does not have a grip on the armed forces which are reserved for President Conté and his general officers. However, Kouyaté can commit himself in two directions to limit the risk of further civilian massacres by men in uniform: properly support the work of the Independent Inquiry Commission "charged with investigating the crimes and serious human rights

⁵¹ See the recommendations of Crisis Group Report, *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.

⁵² Crisis Group interviews, unionists and other civil society representatives, Conakry, N'Zérékoré, Kankan and Labé, July 2007.

⁵³ See "Face aux accusations, Kouyaté doit s'expliquer", *Le Diplomate*, 9 October 2007.

⁵⁴ He was therefore able to establish the truth about the figures put forward by the press by explaining that the renovation of his residence had cost 900.9 million Guinean francs (about \$215,000) and not 4 billion Guinean francs (\$952,000) as mentioned on several occasions by the part of the press which is resolutely hostile to Kouyaté in September, particularly the paper *L'Observateur*.

violations committed during the strikes of June 2006 and January/February 2007” and consolidate the means and training of the police force and gendarmerie, who must be the only people in charge of maintaining order, including in expectation of securing future electoral operations.

As regards the inquiry commission that has been granted, according to the law which created it, “all police and investigative powers”, the government must provide everything it needs to accomplish its mission in calm conditions, including making a special combined gendarmerie/police brigade available, as provided for by law. On 21 September Kouyaté finally appointed nineteen members of the commission after months of waiting for the promulgation of the law by President Conté and hesitation over instigating the constitutional provisions which apply a law voted by parliament and not declared by the head of state after ten days without reason.

Now that the prime minister has appointed the members of the commission, he must effectively set it up and accept the principle of outside technical assistance for this commission (particularly from the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the African Union Court and the Office of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights).

To demonstrate his opposition to impunity and give a clear sign to members of the security forces, the government must set a new date for the visit by the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston; first planned following the murderous repression in March 2007, this visit has still not taken place, despite agreement in principle by the Guinean government.⁵⁵ No more administrative reasons should be invoked to delay it indefinitely. Local human rights organisations have done remarkable work to collect information on the events. They deserve the support and attention of the international community which must reiterate its determination to see that the authors of these crimes are punished.

The carnage in January and February was not just a result of the desire of the security forces to kill as many demonstrators as possible. The variety of circumstances in which dozens of people were beaten shows that the lack of training received by the security forces, including handling the weapons they bear, the insufficient numbers of forces normally assigned to maintain order (police officers and gendarmes) and insufficient means to control crowds, which should

enable these forces to intervene without firing on unarmed demonstrators, are also direct causes of the tragedy.⁵⁶

The prime minister, the interior minister and the defence minister must make this issue a priority, assess the urgent needs in terms of training and equipping the police and gendarmerie, and find the funding and outside assistance required.⁵⁷ Countries that have a tradition of military and security cooperation with Guinea must be involved, as must ECOWAS which should in particular contribute to the security of the future legislative elections.⁵⁸ In the end, there is no alternative to real reform of the security sector.⁵⁹

B. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES

For all those who really want to change how Guinea is governed, the only real requirement is united action. The strength of the January/February revolt was its national character which transcended ethnic, regional and partisan considerations. It was also due to the apparent simplicity of the message: the rejection of a political and economic system which had made a potentially rich country like Guinea a model of state bankruptcy (without a civil war) in West Africa. The obvious divisions within the union movement, and more generally between the leaders of the popular uprising at the start of the year, can only benefit the Conté clan. Representatives from civil society are right to criticise the prime minister’s action and show impatience.

But they should not lose sight of the fact that the main obstacles to change are the holders of Conté’s system of power and that it would be better to discreetly urge Kouyaté to correct his mistakes and avoid new blunders than totally discredit his government and actually help Conté to take back all his power. In the current context, the alternative to keeping the prime minister is an uncertainty full of danger: a further more chaotic popular revolt than the last one and/or a brutal return to power by Conté, his army officers and Red Berets.

The euphoria of victory in February and the new status acquired by the leaders of the general strike must now give way to realism and cooperation with all the others

⁵⁵ Report by the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, UN General Assembly, 16 August 2007.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, gendarmerie officer and a diplomatic source, Conakry, July 2007.

⁵⁷ The announcement by the Guinean gendarmerie commander-in-chief of the future recruitment of 2,000 trainee gendarmes is a step in the right direction, but this effort must be hastened and supported by external partners, particularly in the area of training, including reaching international standards for respecting human rights. See “La gendarmerie de Guinée recrute 2000 éléments pour combler ses effectifs”, 15 October 2007, www.guineenews.com

⁵⁸ See Section IV C below.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group Report, *Change or Chaos*, op. cit.

involved, including opposition political parties. Despite the many limits of Guinean parties, they are the ones with the vocation to take and exercise power in a democratic system. They are the ones who will be represented in the future national assembly. It is in the country's and civil society's interests to work with political figures to force them to adopt a minimum platform and a common strategy to make the next elections the first step towards dismantling the Conté system.

Civil society has a key role to play in the democratic transition and it has already showed this brilliantly. This role is distinct from that of the political parties and must remain so. Union and civil society organisation leaders must encourage parties to propose ideas instead of devoting themselves to the cult of their leaders and battles for individual positioning. Increasing the quality of politics is one of the responsibilities of civil society. If some in civil society are tempted to get involved in politics to defend their vision of change, they must be free to do so. The opposition political parties must work to improve their overall image which is hardly sparkling as far as the population is concerned. That can only be done by being present on the ground and showing that they are able to agree on a minimum platform opposite Conté and his supporters. Vibrancy on the political scene will no doubt be observed during the next few months with new alliances, defections and the entrance into politics of new figures.⁶⁰ That is part of the game of normal democracy. But parties can compete to obtain the most seats in parliament while still working together to obtain the best conditions for holding elections and defining a common strategy to prepare for life after Conté.

C. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITIES

ECOWAS, in its role as a regional organisation, had a positive impact in terms of ending the crisis in February 2007 after the chaos that had followed Conté's appointment of his friend Eugène Camara as prime minister. The president of the ECOWAS Commission, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, and an ad hoc mediator chosen for the occasion, the Nigerian former head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida, met representatives from the movement and ensured the replacement of Camara by President Conté with another prime minister accepted by the population.

However, ECOWAS's promises to closely supervise implementation of the recovery strategy, including by opening an office in Conakry, have not been kept. Once again, this regional organisation has given the impression that it is quicker to intervene on a one-off basis to calm an explosive situation than to take on long-term involvement to support democratic change, a much more complicated task. The hostility shown by President Conté and his companions in arms from the old school to any outside interference, including from within the region and Africa as a whole, is a significant obstacle but ECOWAS should not use this as an excuse to abandon strong support for political change in Guinea.

The ECOWAS Commission participated in the forum for partners organised in Paris in July 2007 and contributes to focusing international attention on Guinea, including within the International Contact Group on the Mano River Basin.⁶¹ All the country's influential external partners, including the European Union (EU), France, the U.S., the World Bank, the IMF and the UN, must adopt a common position on how to contribute to democratic, peaceful and civilised change in Guinea, each in its specialised area. In terms of the economy and finance, the Paris forum was a useful indication of intent.

Promises of funding must quickly become concrete sums to enable the government to implement its emergency program. The urgency is real: Kouyaté's team needs results. Beyond the short-term program, the country must fully resume contact with the sponsors in Washington, the IMF and the World Bank, and move closer to concluding the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative so as to subsequently benefit from a substantial reduction in its external debt. If it manages to rid itself of a greedy managing team, Guinea could profit from the colossal overseas direct investments planned in the mining sector (\$15 to \$20 billion over the next fifteen to twenty years in iron and bauxite alone)⁶² to take its population out of great poverty.

In terms of politics, external partners must continue to support the prime minister, while encouraging him to clarify his mission with his fellow citizens, prioritise the organisation of essential legislative elections and demonstrate clear signs of transparency in the management of public affairs. Apart from the EU and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), partners must

⁶⁰ The former Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo for example is not hiding his intention to enter the scene as the legislative elections approach and join the other former Prime Minister Sidya Touré, the historic opponent Alpha Condé and maybe the current head of government, Lansana Kouyaté, in the group of potential candidates to succeed President Conté when the time comes.

⁶¹ The International Contact Group on the Mano River Basin (Guinea, Sierra Leone and by extension Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea Bissau) includes ECOWAS (Presidency and Commission), the African Union, the UN, the EU (Presidency and Commission), France, the UK, the U.S., Nigeria, Ghana and Morocco. This group took over in September 2004 from the International Contact Group on Liberia (created in 2002).

⁶² Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Conakry, July 2007.

provide the additional financing needed to hold elections. In terms of the fight against impunity and the prevention of further massacres, the priorities are commencing the work of the inquiry commission, strengthening the means and training of the police and the gendarmerie, and external supervision of the behaviour of the security forces.

The International Contact Group must reiterate its support for the inquiry commission, require the participation of overseas experts in its work, encourage the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to visit Guinea, and invite its members to provide financial support if the inquiry commission needs it to carry out its work.

ECOWAS should assign a small team of police officers and/or gendarmes to help implement the combined brigade which must serve as the armed arm of the inquiry commission. This team could constitute the embryo of a military and security mission by ECOWAS to observe the behaviour of the Guinean security forces during the future elections.⁶³ Guinean officers cannot participate in external ECOWAS missions in other member states but refuse any intrusion into their affairs by this organisation. Discussions must now be held between the ECOWAS Commission, its current presidency (the President of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré) and the country's civil and military authorities.

Finally, countries which have established military and security cooperation with Guinea, particularly France and the U.S., must also play a role. They should not only make the message about the refusal of any military takeover of power clear, but also help the Kouyaté government to strengthen the means of intervention and training of the police and gendarmerie so that they can maintain order without firing on civilians, and be the only forces deployed in the streets in the event of trouble.

V. CONCLUSION

Did the "February revolution" fail in the end? The general strike, the demonstrations, so many young people massacred ... was it all for nothing? Three months before the anniversary of the popular uprising against the Conté regime, the president is still the only boss and his power base, the armed forces, is putting aside all its internal arguments and tensions to support him. Prime Minister Kouyaté is laboriously leading a government whose ability to act is particularly limited and whose popularity is dissolving.

The results obtained by this government, particularly a capital resumption of international funding for Guinea and a slow down in inflation, do not seem to be enough to dissipate the feeling of malaise and uncertainty about how long the change can last. Today, representatives from Guinean civil society and politics, including those who led the movement at the beginning of the year, are divided: divided over the support to be given to Kouyaté, divided over the attitude to be adopted towards Conté and divided over what should follow the struggle for change. As this report demonstrates, Kouyaté bears some of the responsibility for the current malaise but the divisions are also encouraged and fed by the presidential clan – whose disregard for the general good is no longer in doubt after 23 years of state management.

Without a dialogue between union leaders, other representatives from civil society, political leaders and the government, it will be impossible to adopt a common vision of the minimum content of change and the best way to achieve it. If Guineans are committed to going down this path, they must be staunchly supported by regional and international institutions and external partners who are aware of the country's economic potential in the long term. However, if individual interests, including those of the prime minister and the potential future candidates to President Conté's succession, take precedence over any other considerations, such a fracturing of civil society could well lead to serious political violence and long-term instability.

Dakar/Brussels, 8 November 2007

⁶³ An ECOWAS mission of this kind was recently tested for the legislative elections in Togo on 14 October 2007.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF GUINEA



APPENDIX B

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
CENI	Independent National Electoral Commission
CMIS	Compagnie mobile d'intervention et de sécurité
CNOSCG	Conseil National des Organisations de la Société Civile de Guinée
CNTG	Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée
IMF	International Monetary Fund
PRSD	Poverty Reduction Strategy Document
OIF	Organisation internationale de la francophonie
ONSLG	Organisation nationale des syndicats libres de Guinée
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
HIPC	IMF and World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative
PUP	Parti de l'unité et du progrès, the party of the current President, Lansana Conté
UDTG	Union démocratique des travailleurs de Guinée
EU	European Union
UFR	Union des forces républicaines, opposition party led by Sidya Touré
USTG	Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée



International Headquarters

149 Avenue Louise, 1050 Brussels, Belgium · Tel: +32 2 502 90 38 · Fax: +32 2 502 50 38
E-mail: brussels@crisisgroup.org

New York Office

420 Lexington Avenue, Suite 2640, New York 10170 · Tel: +1 212 813 0820 · Fax: +1 212 813 0825
E-mail: newyork@crisisgroup.org

Washington Office

1629 K Street, Suite 450, Washington DC 20006 · Tel: +1 202 785 1601 · Fax: +1 202 785 1630
E-mail: washington@crisisgroup.org

London Office

48 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8LT · Tel: +44 20 7831 1436 · Fax: +44 20 7242 8135
E-mail: london@crisisgroup.org

Moscow Office

Belomorskaya st., 14-1 - Moscow 125195 Russia · Tel/Fax: +7-495-455-9798
E-mail: moscow@crisisgroup.org

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