

GUINEA: CHANGE OR CHAOS

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GUINEA: CHANGE OR CHAOS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 12 February 2007 declaration of siege and establishment of a permanent curfew and martial law by President Lansana Conté after three days of renewed violence brought Guinea to the verge of disaster. Towns throughout the country rallied to the general strike launched on 10 January, turning it into an unprecedented popular protest against the regime. Conté. The repression of the demonstrations – over 100 dead in total since January – and the nomination of Eugène Camara, a close Conté associate – as Prime Minister have shown the regime will do anything to ensure its survival. The international community, which has shown itself unable to stop the killings, needs to react urgently to help produce real change if chaos that could well spread beyond Guinea's borders is to be prevented.

Weakened by illness, Conté clings to his privileges, showing more interest in his extensive agricultural estates than the fate of the country. Receiving conflicting advice from sycophants obsessed by presidential succession and safeguarding their own material interests, he has responded to the rebellious trade unions with a mixture of carelessness, clumsiness and violence. His consent on 27 January to delegate powers to a Prime Minister who would be head of government and the decree he issued four days later setting out the powers of that office do not mean he will actually withdraw or that the Conté system will end soon. Nor do they remove the question of responsibility for the January and February slaughter of unarmed demonstrators.

The choice of Camara, who was currently Minister of State with responsibility for presidential affairs, as Prime Minister on 9 February was a tragic mistake that was received by the people as a provocation. It was promptly followed first by riots, and then by renewed violent repression. The Presidential Guard's red berets and anti-riot police fired live rounds at people but prevented neither looting nor the systematic destruction of state symbols, including property belonging to members of the government, the presidential entourage and others associated with Conté's regime.

Guinea now faces two possible scenarios. There is still a chance, though a diminishing one, for real political change agreed among key Guinean actors with the support of the regional and wider international community. Alternatively, if the Conté regime continues to rely on military repression, it could rapidly bring Guinea to a dramatic spiral of deadly violence: a chaotic and violence popular insurgency which could end with a bloody, military take-over, leading in turn to similar hellish situations which have have torn apart its neighbours.

If it comes to that, the troubles are unlikely to stop at the city limits of Conakry or even the country's frontiers. Chaos in Guinea's Forest Region, bordering Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire, could well destabilise one or more of those frail countries. Likewise, politically unstable Guinea-Bissau could suffer as its President, Joao Bernardo Vieira, seems ready to support his long-time friend, Conté.

Western governments as well as multinational firms that benefit from the country's natural resources, not to mention the Guinean population and their neighbours, value political stability but they would be making a serious mistake if this led them to support efforts to maintain the Conté system. Guinean actors and the international community urgently need to cooperate to implement an action plan that brings about change and prevents an escalation of violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To Trade Union Leaders, other Civil Society Organisations and Political Parties:

1. Support a negotiated non-violent exit strategy to the crisis and call for an end to the looting and destruction of public and private property, the settling of personal scores and all other violence of the sort that accompanied the riots of 9 February 2007.

2. Ask religious leaders (the Guinea Christian Council and the chief imam of Fayçal Mosque) to resume dialogue with the government and mediate with President Conté, the military hierarchy and the trade union leadership, to find an end to the crisis based on the following five points:

- (a) the immediate suspension of martial law, curfew and all violence carried out by the security forces, as well as immediate withdrawal of the presidential guard from the streets of Conakry;
- (b) immediate replacement of Eugène Camara with a Prime Minister chosen from a list to be approved by the trade unions;
- (c) constitutional guarantees on the Prime Minister's powers;
- (d) agreement to hold a national dialogue to decide the nation's future as soon as possible;
- (e) a broadcast by President Conté to the nation confirming these commitments.

3. Negotiate with the regime a constitutional amendment that:

- (a) guarantees the powers and competencies of the Prime Minister ; and
- (b) makes the Prime Minister the constitutional successor of the President if the latter is incapacitated, while further specifying that in such a case he or she will be ineligible to stand for any election organised under the interim presidency.

4. Establish without delay a national dialogue to determine the economic and political priorities of the new government and that addresses, specifically:

- (a) economic measures to be taken immediately to guarantee a social truce;
- (b) postponement for several months of the legislative elections presently scheduled for June 2007 to allow for better preparation, with active support from the European Union and the UN, to be followed by a thorough constitutional review by the new National Assembly and, finally, early presidential elections; and;
- (c) creation of a working group on security sector reform (to include army, police

and gendarmerie), composed of civilians and military officers, to redefine the role of security forces and set up efficient mechanisms for their civilian control.

5. Demand that the mandate of the commission of enquiry which, as provided in the 27 January 2007 agreement, is to investigate the actions of the security forces in that month's demonstrations, be expanded to include the February killings and that its report be published by the end of March.

To President Lansana Conté:

6. Accept the political settlement as outlined in the five points above, including in particular the appointment of a new Prime Minister acceptable to all sides.

To the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Secretary-General:

7. Publicly condemn the recent killings perpetrated by the security forces, which call into question in particular the responsibility of President Conté; the chief of the army staff, General Kerfalla Camara; his deputy, General Arafan Camara; the chief of staff of the gendarmerie, General Jacques Touré; the national police general director, Mohamed Sékouba Bangoura; and the President's son, Captain Ousmane Conté.

8. Invite John Agyekum Kufuor, President of Ghana and current Chair of the AU, to engage with President Conté in order to persuade him to implement the 27 January 2007 agreement in word and spirit and to abide by these new commitments.

9. Create an international contact group on Guinea, composed of representatives of the AU, ECOWAS and the UN Secretary-General, to:

- (a) monitor implementation of the 27 January 2007 and subsequent political agreement and alert the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council as necessary, with a view to their taking prompt actions should the situation deteriorate; and
- (b) coordinate international support for a Guinean working group on security sector reform.

10. Insist upon the participation of international experts mandated by ECOWAS and the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human

Rights in commission of inquiry into acts of violence committed since the beginning of the 10 January 2007 general strike.

To the President of the United Nations Security Council:

11. Place Guinea urgently on the agenda of the Security Council, in order to produce a statement supporting President Kufuor's efforts to negotiate an end to the crisis.

To the European Union and other multi-lateral and bi-lateral Donors:

12. Organise a round table of all donors, including France, the UK, Germany, the U.S., Japan, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the UN Development Program, to meet with the new Guinean government and define the practical details for emergency financial and technical assistance in the fields of economic governance and institutional reform.

To the Governments of France and the United States:

13. Use privileged channels of communication gained through bilateral military cooperation to send a strong message to Guinean army officers that:
 - (a) a takeover of power with the stated aim of a political transition dominated by the army would be unacceptable;
 - (b) individual responsibility must be established for the violent actions of the security forces against civilians since the general strike started in January; and
 - (c) they should comply with externally-supported security sector reform initiatives.

Dakar/Brussels, 14 February 2007

GUINEA : CHANGE OR CHAOS

I. INTRODUCTION

For 23 years the Guinea political scene has been dominated by a single figure, General Lansana Conté. Before him, Guinea, which gained independence in 1958 had known only one other strong man, Ahmed Sékou Touré, whose authoritarian rule was characterised by paranoia about plots, state violence unprecedented in Africa and the country's isolation in the context of its nationalist and socialist stance. Lansana Conté seized power with a group of officers in a coup on 3 April, a few days after the natural death of Sékou Touré, and initially embodied the Guinean people's hope for change. However, their enthusiasm did not last long. Despite his affable and simple exterior, President Conté quickly showed his thirst for power while at the same time giving signs of promoting participation and ending the excesses typical of his predecessor, with whom he had closely collaborated for many years.

Conté has shown himself more able than Sékou Touré to distinguish genuine challenges from those that do not pose a threat to him. He has therefore been able to consolidate his authority since 1985, eliminating his main rivals in the army and also certain key figures of the previous regime.¹ He also understood the need to allow a minimum level of individual freedom and political pluralism and to accept the need for elections in order to protect his government, which has always been military, personal and violent.

Elections as stipulated in the democratic constitution he drafted in 1990, have never posed a threat to the regime. He always kept a firm grip on power and never entertained the possibility of losing any election organised under his tutelage. Only the army posed a threat. In fact, there have been several plots, real and imaginary, during Lansana Conté's 23 years in power, and even more rumours of attempted coups. These were generally followed by preventive arrests in the ranks of the army. Since 2003, the President's deteriorating health has been a more fundamental threat to the longevity of a system that has allowed part of the country's civil and military elite to enrich

itself in outrageous fashion while most of Guinea's nine million people sank deeper into poverty. A vacuum of power and the prospect of a war of succession understandably made observers fear the worst for Guinea, which had so far escaped the civil wars that had destroyed their neighbours (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire).

It was the serious deterioration in the living conditions of the general population and the total absence of any prospect of improvement that finally threatened the Conté regime. Signs of discontent and popular revolt had been scarce till then and were not translated into clear demands for political change. When a general strike began on 10 January 2007, nobody could know how the situation would develop and even less what the outcome would be. Would it be simply the third indication of dissatisfaction by the trade unions in one year, that would end like the preceding ones in an untenable agreement on the price of a sack of rice and the price of fuel? The 18-day strike, the tens of thousands of Guineans who came out onto the streets of Conakry and other towns and the death toll of 60 in demonstrations in January showed that the trade union leaders had now crossed the Rubicon and were getting to grips with the central problem, the Lansana Conté regime. In doing this, they managed to secure the active support of other political and social actors, opposition parties and civil society organisations, and mobilised the masses, despite their precarious living conditions and the risk of repression. However, the situation deteriorated after the appointment of a close associate of Conté, Eugène Camara, as Prime Minister on 9 February. An increasingly deadly popular uprising broke out against the autistic regime. Following popular protests and attacks on the symbols of power on 9, 10 and 11 February, Lansana Conté increased the level of repression, taking the death toll to more than a hundred victims. On a television broadcast on 12 February, he finally declared a state of siege, de facto suspending all civil liberties, entrusting power to the army and establishing a total curfew for ten days.

¹See below on the 1985 purges.

II. THE CONTÉ SYSTEM

A. A SYSTEM BASED ON VIOLENCE AND PATRONAGE

The country's political, economic and social situation particularly deteriorated after the controversial presidential election of December 2003.² The President, already weakened by acute diabetes, won this fraudulent election, which was boycotted by all opposition leaders. This followed two earlier presidential elections in 1993 and 1998. In 2001, a constitutional referendum gave Lansana Conté the opportunity to become President for life, by removing restrictions on the number of presidential mandates and the age limit (70) and extending the mandate from five to seven years. Since his re-election, the President's illness has aggravated the decline of the system which is sustained by three pillars:

- **Control of the army and the security apparatus.** President Conté once again showed, during recent events, that his power is fundamentally based on the support of the army. At the peak of the popular protest, on 21 January, Lansana Conté went to a military camp in Conakry to launch his appeal for unity of the nation and the army. During his 22 years in power, the general has allowed army colleagues – those he did not physically eliminate in 1985 - to get rich.³ These higher echelons of the military hierarchy are also prosperous businessmen whose fate is linked to that of the President.⁴ Officers considered to be less trustworthy, especially because of their ethnic origins, were retired.⁵

² For a description of the political, economic and social situation in Guinea prior to the December 2003 presidential election, see the Crisis Group Africa Report N°74, *Uncertainties at the End of an Era*, 19 December 2003.

³ The most extensive purges within the army (executions, arrests, neutralisations) took place after the coup attempts of 1985 and 1996. After the attempted coup in 1985, attributed to colonel Diarra Traoré, Lansana Conté had approximately 40 officers and non-commissioned officers executed and simply included some 30 leading figures of the Sékou Touré regime, without any judicial procedures. Lansana Conté has gradually removed his potential rivals in the Military Committee of National Recovery, the junta that took power on 3 April 1984.

⁴ Crisis Group conversations with diplomats and sources close to the presidential entourage, Conakry, 22 November - 1 December 2006.

⁵ For example, Generals Bailo Diallo and Abdourhamane Diallo, the highest ranking Fulbé (Peuls) army officers, who

Despite this unequal access to promotions and opportunities for enrichment afforded to those close to the President, the military and the security forces in general have been better protected than the civilian population from the collapse in the standard of living in recent years. Even though they did not necessarily benefit from the regime's largesse, soldiers have nevertheless had the privilege of being able to buy sacks of rice (the staple food in Guinea) at ten per cent of the market price.⁶

- **Impunity for private appropriation of public resources.** The terror of Sékou Touré's regime made corruption and the misappropriation of public goods an extremely perilous enterprise for civil servants. However, the liberalisation of the economy under Lansana Conté has created a "crony capitalism" that encourages total confusion between public and private property. The misappropriation of funds, bribes during public procurement, over-invoicing, everything was permitted to those who were in the President's good books and posed no threat to his power. The opportunities to get rich quick not only maintained the army's loyalty but also brought allegiance from many of the civilian elite who share in the exercise and pleasures of power.

The President often said that his own Ministers were "thieves". He thinks the same is true of all citizens, which makes it easy for him to avoid his responsibilities. In one of his rare recent interviews, Conté said that "if we had to shoot every Guinean who had stolen from Guinea, there would be no one left to kill... and I am not a killer".⁷ With such ethical concepts dominating the management of public affairs, the President has made his country one of the most corrupt in the world. When included for the first time in the annual survey of corruption conducted by Transparency International, Guinea was placed last of all African countries.⁸

were retired at the end of 2005 while officers of the same generation, including the current Chief of army Staff Kerfalla Camara, retained their positions.

⁶ For a description of the army, which is privileged but also divided and closely watched, see the Crisis Group report, *Uncertainties at the End of an Era*, op. cit.

⁷ "Le vieux président et les voleurs", *Le Monde*, 30 November 2006.

⁸ Guinea was placed 160th out of 163 countries in the Corruption Perception Index published by Transparency International in 2006.

□ **The capacity to maintain a façade of democratic elections.** Lansana Conté's Guinea is certainly not an exception in this regard. Like a number of authoritarian regimes in Africa, Conté's has known how to adapt to the democratisation trend of the 1990s. It was enough to organise fake elections at regular intervals to claim legitimacy. The most recent presidential election in 2003 was no exception to the rule. The "political dialogue" between the government and the opposition prior to the elections reached deadlock after the government refused to accept any of the demands of the opposition parties.⁹ The state media, the only broadcasting media until the middle of 2006, remained propaganda tools inaccessible to opposition voices. Guinea Radio and Television (RTG) stayed faithful to this vocation during the general strike and the demonstrations in January, as witnessed by a Crisis Group mission.¹⁰

The public administration, whose most powerful representatives are the governors and prefects, have never tried to hide their subservience to the governing party during elections. This was again the case in the December 2005 local elections. When the economic situation became critical and the regime needed foreign aid because of the country's catastrophically poor governance, the government put on the appearance of being more open to political reform without any intention of introducing permanent changes. The most recent political dialogue, in December 2006, on the conditions for the June 2007 legislative elections, allowed the government to obtain the resumption of European Union aid even as the social revolt was brewing.¹¹

Supported by these three pillars, the Conté system has been able to broaden its circle of beneficiaries by playing a game of lightning quick promotions and demotions. This allowed it to redistribute some of the fruits of the pillage of the state, neutralise untimely ambitions and reaffirm the authority of its only leader, President Conté.¹² The specific legacy of Sékou Touré's

'1st Republic' also explains the ease with which such a corrupt and incompetent regime as Conté's was able to avoid a popular uprising for nearly 23 years. Sékou Touré's dictatorship profoundly traumatised Guineans and destroyed any temptation they may have had to challenge the established order. It also made mistrust a fundamental feature of Guinean society. Such mistrust, typical of totalitarian regimes, added to the existing mistrust between Guinea's ethnic groups, making any collective action difficult, whether by opposition political parties, civil society organisations or the armed forces.¹³ One of the notable consequences of the distrust between the main ethnic groups has been to prevent the emergence of a strong and united opposition capable of capitalising on the Conté regime's evident failure.¹⁴ This is exactly what the trade union centres have finally managed to do.

B. A REGIME RUNNING OUT OF STEAM

During the last three years, President Conté has taken many actions and made many statements that clearly show he is enjoying only the privileges and completely ignoring the responsibilities of his position. Since December 2003, Crisis Group reports have pointed out the dangers that the decline of the Guinean state represents for the people in all West African countries, in the context of the crisis in Côte

¹³ Sékou Touré's nationalist and unitary discourse did not reduce the importance of ethnic difference. Although no ethnic group was spared from the Touré regime's crimes (Touré was a Maninka), the Fulbé and the so-called Forest peoples (various groups living in the Forest Region, in the south of the country) believe they suffered more than other ethnic groups. Lansana Conté has not hesitated to play the ethnic card by promoting members of his own Sosso (or Soussou) group in the military hierarchy and by promoting ethnic tensions, sometimes openly. On the morrow of the attempted coup by colonel Diarra Traoré in July 1985, some Sosso hunted down Maninkas in Conakry, looting their shops. In a speech delivered in the Soussou language, President Conté welcomed the ethnically targeted attacks in an expression that became famous in Guinea, "Wofatara", which means "well done". See Thierno Bah, *Mon combat pour la Guinée* (Paris, 1996). The main ethnic groups are the Fulbé (approximately 40 per cent), the Maninka (approximately 30 per cent), the Sosso (almost 20 per cent) and the Forest peoples.

¹⁴ The opposition parties mainly depend on the personality of their leaders and their ethnic origin. The party of the 'historic' opponent of the regime, Alpha Condé, recruits mainly from the Maninka; Mamadou Bah and Ousmane Bah from the Fulbé group; and Jean-Marie Doré from the Forest peoples. The reputation of the party of the former Prime Minister, Sidya Touré, member of a very small ethnic group, rests more on his achievements as Prime Minister under Conté. See Crisis Group report, *Guinea in Transition*, op.cit.

⁹ See the Crisis Group report, *Uncertainties at the end of an era*, op. cit.

¹⁰ Crisis Group mission to Conakry, 11-17 January 2007. The RTG played down support for the general strike and broadcast messages calling for calm and national unity in support of the president.

¹¹ See section IV.B of this report.

¹² See the Crisis Group report, *Uncertainties at the End of an Era*, op. cit.; the Crisis Group Africa Report N°94, *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, 14 June 2005; the Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°37, *Guinea in Transition*, 11 April 2006.

d'Ivoire, the fragile post-conflict reconstruction of Sierra Leone and the recent end to the civil war in Liberia.¹⁵ With the President seriously ill and spending most of his time in his village, the feeling that the country was on the brink of chaos and a power struggle between clans had begun became a palpable reality in April 2006.

On 4 April 2006, a presidential decree was broadcast on national radio announcing a wide-ranging reshuffle of the government and strengthening the position of the Prime Minister, Cellou Dalein Diallo. A technocrat and product of the Conté system, Diallo had been appointed by the President to try and restore the economy and public finances after they had drifted out of control, and to convince international donors to resume financial assistance to Guinea. With this aim, and also without doubt to strengthen his own position with an eye on the succession to the presidency, Dalein Diallo undertook economic reforms and attacked strong vested interests, notably those of the businessman Mamadou Sylla, President of the Guinean Employers Association (*Conseil National du Patronat*), and a friend and business associate of President Conté.¹⁶ The Prime Minister also clashed with Fodé Bangoura, the powerful Secretary General of the Presidency and a close collaborator of the Head of State for many years. On 5 April, the presidential decree of the previous day was replaced by another that dismissed the Prime Minister without appointing a new one.

Having been appointed Minister of State with responsibility for presidential affairs and coordination of the government, Fodé Bangoura became the regime's new strongman, at least among civilians. Secretive and feared by his potential opponents in the circles of power,¹⁷ Bangoura embodied loyalty to President Conté and was the point of stability among the government teams that succeeded each other in response to the whims of the head of state and the pressures exercised by the different clans that influenced his decisions: clans

led by the President's wives and his own family, army officers, old faithful colleagues of the President, the leaders of the governing party, the Party for Unity and Progress (PUP), and not least the powerful foreign and Guinean business networks that prosper in the President's antechamber.¹⁸

Despite his hegemonic ambitions and his position as de facto Prime Minister, Fodé Bangoura, like his predecessors, was unable to build the governmental cohesion indispensable for promoting genuine economic and social change and capable of halting the continuing fall in living standards.¹⁹ In a dramatic turn of events typical of Guinean politics, Fodé Bangoura was ruthlessly dismissed on 19 January 2007, at the peak of the crisis. He was replaced by the Planning Minister, Eugène Camara, a less controversial personality but still a member of the Conté government teams for the last 10 years.²⁰ This is the same Eugène Camara that the President appointed Prime Minister on 9 February, provoking another popular uprising.²¹

In December 2006, the Conté system again showed its true nature. On 16 December, President Lansana Conté's vehicle stopped in front of Conakry's central prison. The head of state, who would have been surprised to learn that two of his friends had been

¹⁵ See the Crisis Group report, *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, op. cit., and the Crisis Group briefing, *Guinea in Transition*, op. cit.

¹⁶ For an account of the economic and financial reforms undertaken by the Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo and his efforts to put a stop to fiscal exemptions and other largesses that unduly benefited the business enterprises of Mamadou Sylla, see the Crisis Group report, *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, op. cit. Diallo's predecessor as Prime Minister, François Lonsény Fall resigned in April 2004, two months after he took office, having realised it was impossible to put any kind of order into the country's finances without disturbing the pillars of the Lansana Conté regime.

¹⁷ Crisis Group conversations with journalists, diplomats, politicians and civil society leaders, Conakry, 12-17 June 2006 and 22 November-1 December 2006.

¹⁸ For a description of the 'presidential clans', their modus operandi and the game of promotions and demotions, see the Crisis Group report, *Uncertainties at the End of an Era*, op. cit., and *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, op. cit. In addition to the 'boss of the bosses', Mamadou Sylla, among the most high-profile and controversial personalities of the business networks intimately linked to the president were the Italian, Guido Santullo and the French-Guinean, Chantal Colle. However, the Conté system benefits other Guinean and foreign networks operating in particularly lucrative sectors of the economy such as the import of rice, cigarettes and alcohol, public works and mobile telephones. The circulation of enormous quantities of liquid money, both Guinean francs and American dollars, outside the banking system, including the country's central bank (BCRG), which lacks any credibility, exposes the Guinean economy to the risk of an irreversible criminalisation. Crisis Group conversations with business figures and civil society organisers, Conakry, 22 November - 1 December 2006.

¹⁹ Initially allying himself to the rich and controversial president of the Guinean Employers Association, Mamadou Sylla to get rid of the former Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo, Bangoura then disassociated himself from Sylla and showed a suspicious eagerness to see him prosecuted by the Guinean judiciary, humiliated by the red-berets of the presidential guard and finally imprisoned. See "Affaire Mamadou Sylla : le film de son arrestation", www.guineeconakry.info, 7 December 2006.

²⁰ "Décret présidentiel : Fodé Bangoura est remplacé par Eugène Camara", www.guineenews.org, 19 January 2007.

²¹ See section IV.A.3 of this report.

arrested within the last week, personally went to release them.²² Mamadou Sylla and Fodé Soumah, former Minister and more particularly Vice Governor of the Central Bank, are accused of issuing false cheques, misappropriating public funds and complicity with regard to a sum of more than 15.5 billion Guinean francs (approximately €2 million).

Businessman Mamadou Sylla owes his dazzling accumulation of wealth to his collusion with the President, which has allowed him to control many public sectors within the economy and gain tax exemptions and favours from the central bank among other unwarranted advantages. Fodé Soumah, once known as “the PUP’s godfather”, enthusiastically led the December 2003 presidential campaign on behalf of the sick President, freely distributing cash and using variants of the “Conté forever” slogan.²³ The vice governor then adopted a lower profile as Minister for Youth and Sports. Diplomats who were trying hard to believe that the charges laid against these two close associates of the President marked the beginning of a vast campaign to clean up the government had to capitulate when the President went to free his friends and explained that he embodied justice.²⁴

On 22 December, a presidential decree reshuffled the government for the umpteenth time, resulting in the dismissal of three Ministers whose relations with the then Minister of State, Fodé Bangoura, had deteriorated. These included the Minister of Transport, Alpha Ibrahima Keira, brother-in-law of the President’s influential second wife, Kadiatou Seth Conté. The resulting turmoil and pressures from the family clan

rapidly achieved their ends.²⁵ On 27 December, another presidential decree confirmed the Minister of Transport in his post and the dismissal of the two others. As in April 2006, it is an open question as to whether President Conté reads these decrees before signing them, and whether his collaborators profit from his poor health to take advantage of him, or whether he uses his illness as an excuse and knowingly changes his decisions.²⁶ However, whenever his power is at stake, the President rediscovers his lucidity as the events of January showed.

The characteristics of the Conté system – corruption, nepotism and repression - have made Guinea a unique country. The depth of poverty, the dilapidation of the infrastructure and the inability of the state to provide basic social services, makes the country look like it has just emerged from a civil war. However, Guinea has escaped the conflicts that have ravaged its immediate neighbours, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire. It certainly suffered violent rebel attacks from Sierra Leone and Liberia in 2000 and 2001 when the latter country was led by Charles Taylor but hostilities and destruction remained localised.²⁷ It also received more than 200,000 refugees from these neighbouring countries at war.

However, these episodes cannot explain the current state of the country. Guinea has exceptional natural resources and should be one of the richest countries in West Africa. It is the way the country has been governed by Sékou Touré for 26 years and by Lansana Conté for 23 years that explain the country’s situation. The uprising by Guineans in January 2007 cannot therefore have been a surprise.

²² “El Hadj Mamadou Sylla et Fodé Soumah élargis : l’épilogue d’une libération”, www.aminata.com, 17 December 2006. After this incredible act by President Conté to free in people accused of destroying the economy, the prosecutor of the Republic at the Kaloum court of first instance awkwardly tried to explain that it was a “provisional release that should not be interpreted in a tendentious way”. The prosecutor insisted that “no pressure has been put on the justice system in this case, nor had the decision been due to any outside intervention”. So the head of state simply went to the prison and released his friends. One can understand why Guineans have the unfortunate impression that the authorities take them for fools. See “Libération de Mamadou Sylla et Fodé Soumah: le procureur de la République près le TPIK s’explique”, www.guineenews.org, 18 December 2006.

²³ Fodé Soumah campaigned using the presidential helicopter and popularised the short but effective doctrine of “koudaïsme”, literally “Forever!”, to glorify the eternal reign of Conté. Crisis Group interview, university, Conakry, 25 November 2006.

²⁴ Crisis Group conversations with diplomats and representatives of international institutions, Conakry, 22 November - 1 December 2006.

²⁵ Crisis Group interviews with journalists and civil society personalities, Conakry, 11-17 January 2007.

²⁶ Sources close to the presidential entourage say that the President is losing his memory and tends to take the advice of the last person he spoke to. Direct private access to the general, in these conditions, would be essential to get the ‘right’ decision. Crisis Group interviews, Conakry, 29 November - December 2006.

²⁷ For more details on Guinea’s role in the conflicts of the River Mano region (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea) and their implications for the country’s stability, see the Crisis Group reports, *Incertitudes autour d’une fin de règne*, op. cit, and *Stopping Guinea’s Slide*, op. cit.

III. THE JANUARY 2007 STRIKE

A. FROM GENERAL STRIKE TO DEMONSTRATIONS

The head of state's visible contempt for the rule of law and the constitutional principle of the separation of the executive and judicial powers, government instability and nepotism tried the patience of Guinean civil society. On 2 January, the trade unions, who since the 27 February to 3 March 2006 general strike, had established themselves as the only organised and credible force capable of giving expression to popular discontent, announced an indefinite general strike starting on 10 January 2007 and continuing "until the re-establishment of Republican order."

The country's two trade union confederations, the *Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée* (CNTG) and the *Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée* (USTG), denounced both "the interference in the judiciary by the head of state, head of the executive, to secure the illegal release of citizens in conflict with the law", "the proven incapacity of the government to stop the depreciation of the Guinean franc, which fuels inflation and the drastic fall in the people's purchasing power" and "the proven incapacity of the head of state to properly discharge the mission conferred on him by the Guinean people in accordance with the fundamental law." The trade union leaders concluded there were no longer credible interlocutors in either the government or among employers for the implementation of the tripartite agreements signed on 3 March and 16 June 2006, after the two previous general strikes.²⁸

The governing party and government rapidly concluded that the unions had exceeded their remit by this political stance. The January general strike was from the very beginning undoubtedly a challenge to a regime that had run out of steam rather than an ordinary strike in support of sector demands. Like the vast majority of their fellow citizens, the trade union leaders had simply understood that the defects of the Conté system (bad governance, corruption, nepotism, wheeling and dealing) were the direct cause of the stagnation of their already low incomes; the inflation that made them even poorer every day; the constant water and power cuts for the minority that had access to them; the disastrous education system whose

diplomas, whether genuine or false, provide no access to employment; the dilapidated state of hospitals and roads that was so bad it isolated entire areas of the country, such as the Forest Region.²⁹ In October 2006, between 4,000 and 6,000 residents of N'Zérékoré, the country's second biggest city, located near the border with Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, took to the streets to protest against their neglect by the central government.³⁰

The strike that began on 10 January had a large following from the start, as the Crisis Group mission to Conakry was able to observe first-hand.³¹ Civil servants, employees in the private formal sector and traders in the informal sector all stayed at home. The banks remained closed and the key bauxite sector, the Guinean economy's most important resource, also joined the movement one week later. Even though some shop owners closed their shops more because they were frightened of breakages and looting than out of support for the strike, the result was the same: the country was completely paralysed.

The strike remained non-violent until the clumsy then repressive reaction of the government provoked trade union leaders and the general public to demonstrate. On 14 January, at the President's request, the trade unions submitted written proposals for resolving the crisis. Among emergency measures to support purchasing power and the full implementation of previously signed tripartite agreements, the trade unions demanded from President Conté "the establishment of a broad-based administration, led by a Prime Minister as head of

²⁸ Notice of general strike issued by the combined unions CNTG-USTG on 2 January 2007 and signed by the CNTG General Secretary, Hadja Rabiathou Serah Diallo and the USTG General Secretary, Dr Ibrahima Fofana.

²⁹ According to official statistics, the average increase of prices to the consumer (inflation) rose from three per cent in 2002 to 12.9 per cent in 2003 then to 31.1 per cent in 2005. Estimates put inflation at 25 per cent in 2006. See Guinea Country Report by the Economist Intelligence Unit, December 2006. For Guineans, the yardstick they use to measure their growing poverty is the cost of a 50 kg sack of rice. It rose from GF 24,000 in the middle of 2003 to GF 35,000 in March 2004, GF 75,000 in June 2005, GF 110,000 at the time of the strike in June 2006 and GF 130,000-150,000 in January 2007. Given that the official salaries of the best paid senior civil servants are no more than GF 400,000, it is clear that most Guineans cannot at the same time feed their families and pay the costs of transport and education for their children with their official salaries. Most "get by" by reducing their number of meals per day. However, the comfortable minority spends several dozen times more than their official salaries. Another significant economic variable is the rate of exchange between the Guinean franc and the American dollar. One dollar was worth GF 2,600 in June 2004, GF 4,950 in April 2006 and GF 6,600 at the beginning of January 2007.

³⁰ See "Manifestation pour le désenclavement du sud", Agence France-Presse, 27 October 2006.

³¹ Crisis Group mission to Conakry, 11-18 January 2007.

government”, which, according to the document, would allow the head of state to “retire and look after his health better.”³²

The President of the National Assembly, Aboubacar Somparé, was the first to respond on behalf of the head of state. He ignored the central political demand of the unions and promised to satisfy some of their economic and social demands. The union leaders’ refusal to call an end to the strike provoked the wrath of Lansana Conté. A peaceful march in the administrative centre of Conakry (Kaloum commune), on 17 January, led by two of the movement’s key figures, Ibrahima Fofana (USTG) and Rabiataou Serah Diallo (CNTG), was violently dispersed. In the evening, President Conté, installed in one of the military camps in the town centre, paternalistically admonished the strikers before threatening to kill them: “I will kill you, however many of you there are. I am a soldier, it won’t be the first time I’ve killed”, he challenged them.³³ On 18 January, the strike almost became a nationwide uprising and the demonstrators’ message became more radical: they demanded the departure of the President.

In addition to the suburbs of Conakry, nearly all the towns in the interior of the country showed their support for challenge to the Conté regime. From east to west and north to south, Téli-mélé, Koundara, Dalaba, Pita, Labé, Mamou, Dabola, Siguiri, Kankan, Kissidougou and N’Zérékoré were the scenes of large-scale demonstrations. Clashes took place with the security forces between 18 and 23 January in most places, and some ten demonstrators were shot dead, even before the bloody day of 22 January. The union confederations and the National Council of Guinea Civil Society Organisations (CNOSCG) convened a major peaceful demonstration on that day. Thousands of demonstrators came from the outer suburbs and converged on the city centre, the symbol of Conté’s power. Clashes with the security forces, police and gendarmerie began as soon as crowds began to gather in the suburbs.

However, it was only when the human tide of demonstrators tried to cross the 8 November Bridge, on the way to the city centre, where the red-berets of the presidential guard, gendarmes and police officers were stationed, that the repression became more lethal. The objective of the security forces was to

prevent demonstrators entering the city centre. They achieved their objective, by firing live rounds at unarmed young people. On the same day, 22 January, the red-berets under the leadership of the President’s son, Ousmane Conté ransacked union offices at the Labour Exchange (*Bourse du travail*). They beat up the assembled union leaders and detained them for six hours at the headquarters of the police force’s Mobile Security and Intervention Brigade (CMIS).³⁴

At least 59 unarmed civilians, including minors, were killed by the security forces between 15 and 24 January. Observers may have thought this was simply a general strike that went wrong but it was really a popular uprising. In a country where repression and impunity for police officers, gendarmes and soldiers is part of an almost 50-year-old culture, the thousands of people who took to the streets knew that they were risking their lives. They wanted to express their anger at a regime that is in decline but refuses to disappear and because many of them felt they had little left to lose. A few days before 22 January, in the middle of the general strike, it was still difficult to imagine that the residents of Conakry would respond so massively to the call to demonstrate.³⁵

There is a difference between following a strike by staying at home and going out to demonstrate in a city swarming with security forces. It was particularly significant that the uprising had also spread to the towns in the interior of the country, including very isolated places like Koundara on the border with Mali. The uprising was neither a whim of the capital nor an expression of discontent by any single social or ethnic group. Even Kaloum commune (city centre) home of a large Sosso community, the same ethnic group as President Conté, joined the revolt. It was also significant that the governing party (PUP) totally failed in its attempts to organise a counter-demonstration of support for the regime. The only “demonstration” of support for the regime took place inside a military camp and was organised by soldiers’ wives, in the presence of the President.

When Lansana Conté finally understood that he was facing the biggest challenge he had faced since the 1996

³² Proposals by the trade union centrals CNTG, USTG, ONSLG and UDTG to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Guinea, 14 January 2007. Crisis Group has a copy of this document.

³³ Info-31, bulletin of the CNTG-USTG union alliance, now broadened to include the ONSLG and the UDTG, 18 January 2007.

³⁴ For an account of the punitive raid on the Labour Exchange and the detention of union leaders, see Maseco Condé’s interview with the USTG General Secretary, Ibrahima Fofana, on www.lediplomateguinee.info: “Today, Monday, we were tied up and imprisoned before being freed by President Conté in person but the strike will continue until the final victory”, 23 January 2007. The President’s son, Ousmane Conté, denied participating in the raid but corroborating sources in Conakry state that he led the operation.

³⁵ Interviews with Crisis Group, Conakry, 11-18 January 2007.

mutiny and attempted coup, he decided to fall back on the support of his army, rely on the propaganda broadcast by Guinean Radio Television (RTG), appeal for unity, peace and the status quo and organise mediation by his first wife, Henriette Conté, and the Presidents of the state institutions – Parliament, the Supreme Court and the Economic and Social Council. The General-President rediscovered his lucidity and appealed for national unity, especially the unity of the army.

Among the more likely possible short-term scenarios was a military coup that could just as well come from the President's most faithful supporters as from the "young officers" who many Guineans believed they could count on to organise a transitional military government along the same lines as in Mali and Mauritania.³⁶ Even though there was a strong chance that the army would support the President for as long as possible, either because it was used to doing so or because of loyalty and community of interests, it could still have been pushed into action if the popular uprising had overwhelmed the units involved in repression of the demonstrations. The President finally accepted a compromise, no doubt tactical, with the unions to resolve the crisis. However, the situation did not remain quiet for long and demonstrations began again on 10 February. The possibility of the army turning on its supreme leader was once again on the agenda.

B. KEY ACTORS AND THE DYNAMICS OF A POPULAR UPRISING

Since 27 February 2006, when the first general strike to bring the country to a halt began, trade unionists have become the pivotal actors in economic, social and political life. The strike signalled the renaissance of a key sector of civil society, which played a major role in Guinea before independence in 1958 and until trade unions were dismantled and banned in 1961 by Sékou Touré, himself a former trade union leader, after a teachers' strike. Trade unions were legalised again in 1990 but have not had much influence on the course of events until now. The deterioration of the economic situation and the impoverishment of the

workers they represent have put them firmly back in the saddle in recent years.

Unlike political parties, which by definition are oriented towards the conquest of power, trade unions have the capacity to unite all sectors of the population in the task of defending the living conditions of workers and, by extension, those of all citizens. They are also the only actors to dispose of a powerful legal instrument of collective action, the right to strike, without immediately exposing themselves to the fury of a government that is quick to interpret any such expression of public opinion as an attempt at political destabilisation.

The year 2006 saw the beginning of an unprecedented challenge to the Conté regime and even more unprecedented discussion on how to rid the country of political archaism and economic depression. The general strike of 27 February – 3 March, the national social consultation held on 17-20 March, the general strike of 12-16 June (which resulted in the death of a least eleven young people at the hands of the security forces)³⁷ and the round tables on Guinean development issues, 5-16 October, were all initiatives that led to the emergence of strong demands for radical change during the January 2007 strike.

These initiatives allowed an exchange of ideas between political parties, trade unions, other civil society organisations and even representatives of the government, most of whose members are aware of the degeneration of the regime and the country. Despite their differences about how to achieve change and their jockeying for position, most Guinean political and social actors are agreed on one point: the need to break with the Conté system.

Structurally weakened by political conflicts, ethnic antagonisms, the regime's repressive capability and their leaders' hesitation to take personal risks to make their commitment more credible, the opposition parties understood that the unions have far greater power to mobilise Guineans than they themselves have. However, the parties were not completely absent from the popular uprising in January. In a statement issued on 8 January, 14 opposition parties declared their support for the general strike and called on all citizens to carry out "acts of civil disobedience" to accompany the trade union revolt.

³⁶ Interviews with Crisis Group, Conakry, 22 November - 1 December 2006, 11-18 January 2007. In Mali, a bloodily repressed student revolt in 1991 encouraged a group of military officers to depose the autocratic Moussa Traoré. The officers, led by Toumani Touré, kept their promise and returned power to civilians after elections. Toumani Touré later came to power democratically after ten years in the background. In Mauritania, a military junta overthrew the autocratic Maaouiya Ould Taya in August 2005 and promised to organise elections and return power to civilian hands after a period of transition that is still under way.

³⁷ See "The Perverse Side of Things, Torture, Inadequate Detention Conditions, and Excessive Use of Force by Guinean Security Forces", Human Rights Watch report, vol. 18, no. 7 (A), August 2006.

Although political party leaders were especially discreet, their youth movements made efforts to mobilise residential areas. Fear of repression largely explains the low profile adopted by the parties during the January demonstrations. If the uprising had, from the start, been led by opposition parties, it would have been interpreted by the government as an attempt to overthrow it and treated as such, that is, it would have been severely repressed. By making the link between the dreadful living conditions of workers and the catastrophic governance at the highest levels of government, the trade unions were able to stay true to their role while advancing a major political demand, that is, the withdrawal of President Conté in favour of a Prime Minister as head of a broad-based government.

The general strike was supported by other civil society organisations, notably those united under the banner of the National Council of Guinea Civil Society Organisations (CNOSCG). The real leaders of the rising remained the trade union leaders who consistently called for strike action and non-violent demonstrations, even after being beaten and humiliated by the security forces. The general secretary of the *Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée* (CNTG), Rabiadou Serah Diallo, and her counterpart of the *Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée* (USTG), Ibrahima Fofana, together with the leaders of two other trade union organisations,³⁸ symbolised a revolt that quickly became national and popular. The Labour Exchange, where the CNTG offices are located, served as strike headquarters.

Every day, the trade union leaders reported to their constituency on the negotiations with the government and discussed how to continue the action.³⁹ Despite the violence they were subjected to, especially on 22 January, when they were beaten, arrested and their officers ransacked, the trade union leaders continued to negotiate with the government that was attacking them and even made excuses for President Conté, who ordered their release on the evening of 22 January.⁴⁰

The moderation shown by union leaders and the involvement of religious authorities limited the extent of the massacre of civilians. After the approximately 50 deaths recorded on 22 January, the leaders of the uprising could have closed the door to further negotiations and purely and simply demanded, as did many demonstrators, the departure of President

Conté. The country could then have been plunged, into a bloody and lethal spiral of demonstrations, repression and settling of accounts that would not have spared the families and clans closely or less closely associated with the government.

Trade union leaders displayed a great sense of responsibility throughout the events of January, as did most demonstrators in Conakry and other towns that initially abstained from destruction and looting. In the town of Labé, it was the women who launched an impressive demonstration on 21 January. The reaction of people in Conakry after the strike was suspended on 27 January showed both respect for the leadership of the trade unions and a readiness to go back on strike and demonstrate if asked to, but also frustration at an outcome that was no more than a vague promise of change. If this promise was not translated into practical measures, there was every chance that the next uprising would get out of control, with no discipline or moderation. That is exactly what happened after the appointment of a long-time collaborator of the President, Eugène Camara, as Prime Minister on 9 February, instead of the consensus personality demanded by the unions and the public. The uprising that began on 10 February was more violent and uncontrolled and has been accompanied by a looting and the settling of accounts.

³⁸ The two other trade union organisations are *Organisation nationale des syndicats libres de Guinée* (ONLSG) led by Yamodou Touré and *Union démocratique des travailleurs de Guinée* (UDTG) led by Abdoulaye Baldé.

³⁹ Crisis Group mission, Conakry, 11-17 January 2007.

⁴⁰ See « Dr Ibrahima Fofana », op. cit.

IV. THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE CHANGE

On 27 January, long negotiations ended with an agreement between the trade unions and the Guinean government that provided for a series of measures, including the establishment of a broadly-based government led by a Prime Minister as head of the government. At this point, the unions decided to suspend the general strike and demonstrations. Apart from the choice of a new Prime Minister with more extensive powers, the main question was whether this outcome had any chance of marginalizing President Conté and changing the system against which Guineans had massively demonstrated and for which struggle dozens of them had sacrificed their lives. Conté's decision to choose one of his close colleagues as Prime Minister, thirteen days after the agreement, left no doubt about the prerogatives of the future head of government. Before discussing this provocation by President Conté, we will present and analyse the agreement that put a very provisional end to the January strike.

A. FROM THE JANUARY 2007 STRIKE TO THE FEBRUARY UPRISING

Trade union leaders and government representatives knew that the general strike could not go on indefinitely without leading to hunger riots and looting. The majority of Guineans are obliged to find a way of feeding their family every day and cannot stay home for very long. Either the popular mobilisation and the death toll quickly reached the critical threshold required to provoke the departure of the President or the transfer of his powers to a Prime Minister, or the union leaders would have to compromise with the government and settle for less than their initial objective of achieving genuine change. The agreement that was finally signed on 27 January seemed to respond to the main political demand of the unions but it did not in any shape or form guarantee the withdrawal of President Conté and even less the beginning of a rupture with the Conté system.

1. The 27 January 2007 Agreement

The negotiations involved the trade unions confederations CNTG, USTG, ONSLG and UDTG, the National Employers Association and government representatives. The Presidents of the National Assembly, Aboubacar Somparé, the Supreme Court, Lamine Sidimé, and the Economic and Social Council, Michel Kamano, all associates of the regime, mediated and Christian and Moslem religious authorities acted as facilitators. The first point of the agreement provided for the appointment

of a Prime Minister and the formation of a new government in these terms:

The President of the Republic agrees to appoint a Prime Minister as head of government in accordance with the powers given to him by article 39 of the Fundamental Law. The draft decree setting out the powers of the Prime Minister and his letter of appointment have received the approval of the Head of State. The Prime Minister, who shall be appointed in the next few days, should be a senior and competent civilian of integrity who has in no way been implicated in malpractice.⁴¹

In addition to this political point, the agreement reaffirmed respect for the separation of powers and the importance of continuing with judicial proceedings against two of the President's friends, Mamadou Sylla and Fodé Soumah, as well as a series of economic and social measures, notably: the reduction in the price of fuel; an immediate end to the export of food, fishing and forestry products; a reduction in the price of rice and the establishment of a commission with responsibility for monitoring the price of rice; revision of the statutes of the Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea (BCRG) and reaffirmation of its independence from the presidency of the Republic; and certain mining, fishing and forestry agreements. The agreement also provided for the establishment of a commission of investigation to find and punish the perpetrators of the atrocities committed during the strike and demonstrations.⁴²

The President's agreement to nominate a Prime Minister as head of the government could a priori be considered a victory for the trade unions. However, caution was essential given the result of previous

⁴¹ See the complete text of the tripartite agreement in appendix C of this report.

⁴² The economic measures included in the agreement had little chance of being fully implemented on a long term basis. For example, it is illusory to hope to maintain a fixed price for a sack of rice when the market is controlled by a clique of private importers and the Guinean currency is constantly losing value on the exchange markets. The excessive increase in the price of staple foods results from the catastrophic management of the Central Bank, monopolistic practices, and more generally, the serious malfunctioning of the Guinean economy, which is dominated by business networks close to the regime. President Conté prides himself on cultivating rice on hundreds of hectares (inherited from his grandparents, he claims), of being the country's biggest beef cattle farmer and "selling his palm oil, at very cheap prices to the village women". See "Le vieux président et les voleurs", *Le Monde*, op. cit. In fact, the president exports more of his rice than he sells on the local market. Crisis Group interviews, Conakry, 22 November – 1 December 2006.

periods of cohabitation between President Conté and reputedly reformist Prime Ministers and given the General's ideas about the exercise of power. The President, who recalled that he owed his position to the grace of God and that he expected to remain in his position, was certainly not ready to abandon his predatory practices.⁴³

In the current legal framework, the Prime Minister, who had not yet been appointed and on who all hopes for change rested, would be in an extremely precarious position. The Guinean Constitution, which follows a presidential model, makes no provision for the position of Prime Minister and even less for a Prime Minister who is head of government and the real holder of executive power. The decree setting out the powers of the Prime Minister goes no further than delegating certain prerogatives of the Head of State to the Prime Minister.

The only guarantee the trade union leaders had regarding the future head of government's margin for manoeuvre was therefore the 27 January agreement, but the only representatives of the Conté regime to sign the agreement were the Minister of State for the Economy and Finances, Madikaba Camara, on behalf of the outgoing government, and the President of the National Assembly, Aboubacar Somparé, on behalf of the mediators. In other words, Lansana Conté, supported by Somparé, Sidimé, Kamano and advised by his civilian and military entourage, had obtained the end of the strike without giving up any of his power. Feeling humiliated by the unions, the General who is known for his vengeful character and states he has never lost a war could now plan to toughen his regime.

2. The 9 February choice of Prime Minister and its tragic consequences

For 13 days, the country waited for the announcement about who would be the new broad consensus head of government to embody the break with the Conté system. Names were put forward to the presidency but the trade union and political party leaders were never formally consulted. Tired of waiting, union leaders threatened to resume the strike on 12 February if the President had not deigned to appoint the Prime Minister by that date. Finally, on 9 February, Eugène Camara, a member of several government teams over the last 10 years and

recently promoted to the post of Minister in charge of presidential affairs, was appointed Prime Minister. While the unions and the general public were expecting the appointment of a neutral and relatively consensual figure, the President chose one of his faithful collaborators, someone who certainly had more integrity than others but who was completely identified with the regime and responsible for financial management that bankrupted the country.

One of the rare foreign visits to Conakry recorded before the January crisis was temporarily resolved was by an Ivorian delegation led by Bertin Kadet, special adviser for defence, security and military equipment. He brought a message from President Laurent Gbagbo to his Guinean counterpart.⁴⁴ Considering how the Ivorian Head of State accepted political agreements then neutralised the Prime Ministers to whom he was supposed to delegate his powers as part of the peace process in his own country, one could only be concerned at the nature of the advice he urgently gave President Conté on 26 January. However, unlike in Côte d'Ivoire, the uprising in Guinea was supported by the majority of the population rather than by opposition parties with limited capacity to mobilise.

In Guinea, the economic situation of individuals is such that the public does not have much to lose. The strike and demonstrations were likely to resume at the first sign of bad faith by President Conté, while the attitude of both demonstrators and red-berets was always going to be more radical than in January. This scenario could result in a bloodbath and the drawnout destabilisation of Guinea and its immediate neighbours. This was nearer than anybody imagined because the President showed his bad faith right from the start with his choice of Prime Minister.

The reaction was immediate and violent. On the night of 9 February, angry demonstrations began in the suburbs of Conakry. The following day, the uprising spread to other parts of the country. The President's cortege was stoned by school students. The presidential guard responded by firing live rounds, killing three. The demonstrations against Lansana Conté, now accompanied by looting and destruction,

⁴³ The President's withdrawal of dollars and euros in cash from the Central Bank and Customs House either in person or through his emissaries, is carried out in broad daylight and known to all residents of Conakry. The presidential office also appeals to the multinationals in the bauxite industry when there is a shortage of currency at the Central Bank. Crisis Group telephone interview, January 2007.

⁴⁴ See "Règlement de la crise guinéenne, Gbagbo envoie Bertin Kadet en pompier", *Le Temps*, 30 January 2007. According to this daily Ivorian newspaper, "the delegation led by M. Bertin Kadet included general Jean-Pierre Lorougnon, Director General of the National Strategy and Intelligence Agency (ANSI) and Special Presidential advisor for security issues, and Commissioner Koudon Okou Laurent, director of ANSI's external affairs department. The conversation with the Guinean President lasted one hour, in the presence of senior Guinean government officials."

spread throughout the country. The towns of Kankan, Faranah, Kindia, N'Zérékoré, Pita, Guéckédou, Dabola, Labé and Siguiri were all ablaze. Prefectures and many other public buildings were set on fire, houses belonging to members of the government or close colleagues of the President were vandalised and looted along with shops and other public and private property. The country had spiralled into the feared chaos more quickly than anyone had imagined.

President Conté had clearly misjudged the extent of the January uprising and the major change that he had provoked: Guineans were no longer willing to quietly submit to his will or whims or to put up with yet more provocation. Two days after the appointment of Eugène Camara, the death toll had risen to about 20. Between the beginning of the first strike on 10 January and its resumption on 12 February, more than a hundred people lost their lives. The message became clearer and unambiguous: the protesters demanded the departure of Conté and his new Prime Minister. Trade union leaders were no longer able to control the groups of unleashed furious young people. The organised strike of January had given away to the February uprising, carried along by crowds that had nothing to lose and were no longer afraid of dying. Now that the looting had started and anarchy had spread to most towns, it would be difficult to put an end to it. The settling of accounts could also be more bloody. Some soldiers had already been killed, lynched by demonstrators. So far, only the belongings of prominent figures of the regime and their families had been targeted. Their physical integrity could be quickly threatened, which would unleash an uncontrollable spiral of violence.

The death toll from new clashes between tens of thousands of young demonstrators determined to fight it out and the Conté government's elite units could very quickly exceed the death toll experienced by another West African country in 2005 in its quest for political change: Togo. The son of the deceased dictator of that country, Gnassingbé Eyadema, who had ruled for 38 years, had been imposed as successor after a rigged election and the bloody repression of opponents by the regime's security forces. According to the United Nations, between 400 and 500 civilians were killed and tens of thousands of Togolese fled the country.

As in Togo, the security forces act as a shield for the government in Guinea. And, also as in Togo, there is at least one son of the President in the army, Ousmane Conté,⁴⁵ who does not hesitate to participate directly in

the repression and who would certainly not complain if he was able to succeed his father. However, there is a big chance that a catastrophe in Guinea would take on a regional dimension because of the country's fragile neighbourhood. The long civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone have inundated Guinea's Forest Region with arms and the latter area has been directly involved in conflicts with its neighbours.

As a previous Crisis Group report emphasised,⁴⁶ Lansana Conté's Guinea has been both a victim and an accomplice of the cross-border wars that have shaken the entire region. Until 2003, it supported, sheltered and armed the Liberian rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) which fought the regime of former President Charles Taylor, who himself attacked Guinea's border towns in 2000 and 2001. Guinea's previous involvement in the Liberian conflict combined with the country's internal political situation could have serious consequences, both in Conakry and the Forest Region on the border with Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire.

In Conakry, several accounts mentioned the participation of Liberian mercenaries in the bloody repression meted out by the Conté regime since the beginning of the crisis. These mercenaries have reportedly been put at the government's disposal by Aïcha Keita Conneh, a former companion of the LURD leader, Sekou Damaté Conneh. Aïcha Keita is very close to Lansana Conté and played a key role in the logistical organisation of the Guinean army's support for the LURD rebellion, including the supply of arms from the Forest Region. Strengthened by her ascendancy over a number of LURD combatants whose subsistence she ensured, she proclaimed herself leader of the movement in 2004, in place of her ex-husband who was losing influence. She has lived in the Guinean capital for many years in a house protected by soldiers and still retains her links with President Conté's entourage.

The danger could also come directly from the Forest Region. The shortcoming of disarmament and reintegration programmes for former combatants in Liberia, the frustrations of the more than 7,000 young Guinean 'volunteers' who had supported their country's army in 2000/2001, the links between ethnic groups along parts of the border and the immense economic problems and geographical isolation of this southern region make it an ideal area for war entrepreneurs tempted to profit from

⁴⁵ Rumours repeatedly indicate that Lansana Conté wants his son to succeed him. This remains a possibility even though

Ousmane Conté's extremely bad reputation, even among the military, make this scenario very unlikely.

⁴⁶ See Crisis Group report, *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, op. cit, for a description of Guinea's role in the conflict in the region and the consequent risks for its own stability.

the collapse of the Guinean government and launch an armed rebellion. Until May 2005, Liberian sources in Ganta and Monrovia noted the latent recruitment and infiltration of combatants in Guinea's Forest Region.⁴⁷ Fortunately, the feared attacks did not materialise.

The current context could make this more likely. If the Guinean army were deployed to put down a popular insurrection against the Conté regime in the towns, the infiltration of armed combatants into the forest could not be easier. A new rebellion would be able to take advantage of the existing political discourse against the anti-democratic, corrupt and violent Conakry government. In reality, such a rebellion would no more serve the public interest than the current regime does. It would plunge Guinea into a civil war and probably involve its immediate neighbours: Liberia, Sierra Leone and even Côte d'Ivoire. The Côte d'Ivoire border with Guinea is controlled by the *Forces Nouvelles*, the ex-rebel army that fought President Laurent Gbagbo, one of Lansana Conté's rare allies.

B. AN ACTION PLAN TO BREAK WITH THE CONTÉ SYSTEM

Guinea is not condemned to plunge into violence nor to continue to fall apart just because of a handful of civilians and soldiers who have pocketed its resources. Guinean civil society, through its trade unions, has shown the path that should be followed and dozens of innocent people have already lost their life because they demanded change. International reaction has been particularly timid.⁴⁸ If African and international institutions want to be taken seriously when they proclaim the need to prevent conflict rather than having to manage subsequent humanitarian crises, they should do all they can to encourage general political change in Guinea and avoid the country descending into hell.

1. The political context prior to the January uprising

The January crisis broke out a few weeks after the conclusion of a political dialogue between the political parties of the presidential majority, the opposition parties and the government. Despite many problems, this dialogue ended with a consensus over four draft laws on: the status of the opposition; the creation of an independent national electoral commission; a system for public subsidy for political

parties; and amendments to the electoral code.⁴⁹ These draft laws are supposed to prepare for legislative elections that are more credible than the rigged ballots that have so far allowed the Conté regime to maintain a democratic facade.

These legislative elections are still scheduled for June 2007. At the end of December 2006, the combination of political dialogue and the appearance of private radio stations in Guinea led the European Union to announce the resumption of cooperation with the country and the future disbursement of €17 million from the ninth European Development Fund.⁵⁰ During a visit to Conakry in October, the European Commissioner for Development Louis Michel spoke of "remarkable progress", an observation that was both excessive and premature.

In a previous report, Crisis Group emphasised the need for Guinean political actors and their foreign partners to do everything possible to organise transparent legislative elections. In addition to the creation of a genuinely independent electoral commission provided with sufficient means to combat the government's attempts at fraud, the report drew attention to the imperative need for an exhaustive revision of electoral lists and the distribution of photographic identity cards to electors.⁵¹ The European Union and the United Nations (UNDP) are already engaged in this task and have begun to supply technical and financial support for the whole electoral process.

The current crisis should not necessarily put an end to this process. Transparent legislative elections would produce a representative national assembly with the legitimacy required to revise the constitution and prepare the way for a new and genuinely democratic republic. The current uprising against the Conté regime does not alter the need to create a technical and institutional framework that will permit, at the appropriate time, the holding of credible elections, whether they are legislative, early presidential elections or a constitutional referendum.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group was able to consult a copy of the report written by the parity commission, including the draft laws prepared by participants in the political dialogue. If they were implemented to the letter, these draft laws would constitute real progress towards the organisation of credible elections.

⁵⁰ "Déclaration de la Présidence du Conseil de l'Union européenne et de la Commission européenne concernant la République de Guinée", Brussels, 11 December 2006. See also "Guinea: EU aid back on but transparency, social problems remain", IRIN, 25 December 2006.

⁵¹ Crisis Group report, *Guinea in Transition*, op. cit.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See section V.

As mentioned above, the year 2006 witnessed a genuine debate among Guineans about the future of their country, a debate that went beyond simple criticism of the incumbent government. The National Consultation of March 2006 even formulated precise political, economic and socio-cultural proposals. It recommended an eighteen-month transition period under the management of a neutral and consensual Prime Minister and the establishment of transitional institutions to oversee constitutional reform and the organisation of local, legislative and Parliamentary elections.⁵² Other political and civil society groups, including those from the large Guinean Diaspora, proposed their own schemes for transition.⁵³

This profusion of proposals expressed the hunger for change present in Guinean society well before the indefinite general strike that began on 10 January. That strike merely served as a detonator. There would be no sustainable way out of the crisis without an end to the Conté system. To achieve that objective, it is not necessary to terminate the processes that are already under way and that aim to organise elections of a standard that would be unprecedented in Guinea and that would allow all the social forces of the country to jointly determine how to achieve the desired radical changes.

2. An action plan for Guinean actors

Lansana Conté has considerably reduced the chances of a negotiated end to the crisis that would allow him to leave the national political scene with some dignity. Entrenched in his palace or in his military camp, he continues to rely solely on the force of arms as a response to the popular uprising. The condition *sine qua non* for a controlled political change that would allow him a honorary role as President and guarantee his security during the political transition is the immediate dismissal of Eugène Camara and the appointment of a new Prime Minister chosen from a list of names approved by the trade unions.

The alternative for the President and his supporters is to continue on the headlong rush that can only end in widespread chaos. The President's camp and its opponents may be able to maintain the status quo for one or two weeks, as Conté is protected by his army while the population is determined to force his resignation. However, Conté cannot continue to apply the iron fist for much longer. Either the military will depose the President

before yet another bloody confrontation with demonstrators or they will be forced to do so after thousands of people overrun the military camps in Conakry.

Guinean civil society and political party actors should sign up to a negotiated scheme to end the crisis and avoid continuing violence and anarchy that will not necessarily end in the desired change of government. The trade union leaders should appeal for an end to the looting, targeted attacks and indiscriminate destruction that have been part of the demonstrations since 9 February. They should also ask the religious authorities who facilitated the January discussions (the Guinea Christian Council and the chief imam of the Fayçal Mosque in Conakry) to resume contact with President Conté and his senior military hierarchy. These mediators should obtain from the President and his entourage a commitment to:

- ❑ immediately end the state of siege; immediately halt all violence committed by the security forces against demonstrators; and withdraw the presidential guard from the streets of Conakry;
- ❑ nominate a new Prime Minister to replace Eugène Camara, chosen from a list of names approved by the trade unions confederations;
- ❑ provide constitutional guarantees for the powers of the Prime Minister;
- ❑ accept, within a very short space of time, a national dialogue to decide the nation's future;
- ❑ announce these commitments in a formal message from the President to the nation

An urgent constitutional amendment to guarantee the powers of the Prime Minister

The powers of the Prime Minister as head of government must be urgently written in to the Constitution. This requires an amendment to article 39 of the Fundamental Law, specifying the extent of the delegation of powers by the President to the Prime Minister. The Article should define the powers of the Prime Minister in accordance with the agreement reached with the trade unions confederations on 27 January. Article 34 of the Constitution on "the vacancy of the post of President of the Republic following the death or resignation of the President of the Republic or any other cause definitively preventing his continuance in office" should also be amended. The vacancy shall be ascertained by the Supreme Court when notified by the President of the National Assembly but the President of the Republic shall be temporarily replaced by the Prime Minister rather than the President of the Parliament. In this case, the Prime Minister may not be a candidate at any election organised during his temporary presidency, in particular, the first presidential election.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For example, see Dominique Bangoura, Mohamed Tétémedi Bangoura, Moustapha Diop, *Quelle transition politique pour la Guinée?* (Paris, 2006).

The advantage of such a reform would be to put an end to the debate on the legitimacy of the current President of the National Assembly, Aboubacar Somparé, regarding whether he should take over as President in the event of their being a vacancy before the next legislative elections. Somparé's association with the decline of the Conté system, which he served after having been an apparatchik of Sékou Touré's sole party, means that he is not a particularly appreciated figure, in his own camp as well as in the opposition. Opposition party leaders never lose an opportunity to argue that Somparé is the President of a National Assembly formed by fraudulent elections and therefore has no legitimacy.

Making a reputedly neutral Prime Minister the constitutional heir apparent to President Conté, but ineligible to succeed him, would resolve this problem and reduce the risk of a vacancy which could result in a military coup. A presidential decree convening the National Assembly in extraordinary session would be all that was required to obtain these constitutional amendments.⁵⁴ Such constitutional amendments should be considered as crisis adjustments providing the legal basis for what would be a political transition in all but name. Once the new parliament is in place, it should conduct an authentic review of the constitution to be validated by a referendum.

A national dialogue to define priorities

This dialogue would include the government, the trade unions, other civil society organisations, political parties and the armed forces. It would be facilitated by the religious authorities, who have already indicated their willingness to play such a role.⁵⁵ It could pronounce on three issues that are essential for the country's future:

- ❑ Urgent economic measures to guarantee a social truce without aggravating the already critical situation of the public finances. This discussion would allow an evaluation of foreign aid needs that could then be submitted to donors at a round table.
- ❑ Postponement of legislative elections for a few months to allow for better organisation with major support from the European Union and the United Nations. In particular, it will be necessary

to ensure the establishment of a genuinely independent electoral commission, a transparent revision of electoral lists, the production and free distribution of secure ballot forms and government neutrality. The National Assembly elected by these elections could immediately begin a review of the Constitution and prepare the way for early presidential elections.⁵⁶

- ❑ The creation of a working group on reform of the security sector (army, police, gendarmerie). Involvement of the defence and security forces is essential in any initiative seeking to change governance in Guinea. These forces must understand that they have a role to play in an authentic democracy and that they do not need to exercise executive power directly or indirectly to guarantee their privileges. They must also integrate as quickly as possible the basic principles of respect for human rights and individual responsibility for any atrocities committed.

The working group will have the job of launching the reconstruction of the security sector on new foundations. It could continue the work already begun by the civilian-military committee established during 2006 to facilitate discussions between civilians and the security forces.⁵⁷ This working group should receive technical assistance from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and bilateral partners who have had military cooperation with Guinea for many years, especially France and the United States.

The need for international experts to participate in the work of the commission of enquiry into abuses

In the 27 January agreement, the parties agreed to "establish a commission of inquiry to find and punish the perpetrators of abuses so that such acts never happen again." Nothing leaves room to believe that

⁵⁴ According to article 91 of the Constitution, it is not obligatory that a proposal for revision of the constitution presented by the President of the Republic to the National Assembly is submitted to a referendum. It must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the National Assembly.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview with religious authorities, Conakry, 11 January 2007.

⁵⁶ At a minimum, such a revision of the Constitution should reestablish the five year limit on the presidential mandate and make it renewable only once, as before the November 2001 revision. At best, a new Constitution should limit the extent of the president's powers to try to break from the authoritarian practices of the Sékou Touré and Lansana Conté regimes.

⁵⁷ The idea of creating a civilian-military commission came about after a series of seminars organised by the American Agency for International Development (USAID) allowed the establishment of a dialogue between a group of civilians (political parties and civil society organisations) and the military. Participants decided to create a civilian-military committee to follow up the seminars. Crisis Group interview with one of the organisers of the civilian-military committee, Conakry, 1 December 2006.

such a statement of intention will result in action without enormous pressure. Police action to repress of the June 2006 general strike resulted in eleven young demonstrators being shot dead. Despite government promises, no members of the security forces have been identified or prosecuted for their crimes. The Guinean authorities' bad faith after the killings of January is obvious. When accredited diplomats in Conakry requested the involvement of foreign partners in the work of the commission of inquiry proposed in the agreement, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Justice firmly refused, saying that the inquiry "is in the interests of Guineans who are the victims and not for international opinion."⁵⁸

Guinean actors must avoid falling into the trap of adopting the same style of nationalism that the defenders of the regime use to protect themselves. They must demand the participation of international experts mandated by ECOWAS and the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights in the work of the commission of inquiry and request the immediate suspension of those suspected of responsibility for the crimes committed, especially members of the national police and presidential guard. The work of this commission should also cover the killings that took place in February.

V. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S DUTY TO INTERVENE

It needed a rising death toll in Conakry after two weeks of strike action in January before the international community reacted by issuing statements on the crisis in Guinea. On 22 January, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, said he was "gravely concerned at the excessive use of force[and] urges the Guinean Government to carry out investigations into the killings with a view to bringing those responsible to justice, including members of the security forces."⁵⁹ On 24 January, the same condemnation of violence and request for an independent investigation came from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour.⁶⁰ On 23 January, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in West Africa, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, visited Conakry to enquire about the situation and meet members of the government.

Several days earlier, on 19 January, the ECOWAS heads of state, at a summit meeting in Ouagadougou, had designated the Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo and his Senegalese counterpart, Abdoulaye Wade, to carry out an urgent mediation visit to Conakry. However, no ECOWAS delegation has yet set foot on Guinean soil. The Guinean government is opposed to such a step. Meanwhile, the silence from ECOWAS has become deafening.⁶¹ During the African union (AU) summit on 29 January, Chair of the AU commission, Alpha Oumar Konaré, vigorously denounced the violence in Guinea and called on the heads of state to be vigilant. The same summit established a "committee of wise men" to be responsible for the prevention of conflicts. However, no direct political action was taken to resolve the Guinean crisis.

After the deterioration of the situation on the appointment of a Prime Minister who was unacceptable to the parties on 9 February, the international community must unanimously and publicly condemn the recent killings perpetrated by the security forces, which call into question in particular the responsibility of President Conté, the chief of army staff, General Kerfalla Camara, his deputy,

⁵⁸ "Enquête sur la boucherie du 22 janvier : Grand fossé entre le Gouvernement guinéen et les diplomates", www.guineenews.org, 29 January 2007.

⁵⁹ Statement attributable to the spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary General, New York, 22 January 2007.

⁶⁰ "High Commissioner for Human Rights calls for probe into Guinea killings and welcomes resumption of dialogue", Geneva, 24 January 2007.

⁶¹ General Ibrahim Babangida, dispatched by President Olusegun Obasanjo, was refused entry to Conakry. See "Guinea snubs delegation from African body", Reuters, 3 February 2007.

general Arafan Camara, the chief of staff of the gendarmerie, General Jacques Touré, the national police director general, Mohamed Sékouba Bangoura, and the President's son, Captain Ousmane Conté. ECOWAS, the AU and the United Nations should also publicly reaffirm their refusal to countenance any military action by the Guinean army resulting in the monopolisation of a possible political transition. In the light of the immediate threat to the peace and stability of Guinea and its fragile neighbours, the President of the Security Council should urgently place a discussion of the situation in Guinea on the council's agenda. The international community must finally decide on the following measures if it really wants to avoid the implosion of Guinea:

- **The personal involvement of the President of Ghana as a mediator.** The President of Ghana, John Kufuor, has the advantage of being the incumbent Chair of the Pan African organisation, a member of ECOWAS and not having to face elections in the short term in his country. The Nigerian and Senegalese Presidents initially designated by ECOWAS to lead mediation efforts in Guinea had little time to deal with foreign affairs because of imminent important elections at home. The Ghanaian President could be accompanied by the ECOWAS executive secretary, Mohamed Ibn Chambas and the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in West Africa, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, who visited Guinea at the peak of the crisis in January.

It remains to convince Lansana Conté to respect the spirit and the letter of the agreement signed on 27 January and accept the new commitments set out above to avoid his long reign ending in a bloodbath. One of the few things to the Guinean President's credit is that he succeeded in preserving his country from the civil wars that have torn apart his neighbours, Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is necessary to convince President Conté to seize the latest opportunity offered to him to withdraw without further exposing himself and his family to popular condemnation or betrayal from within his own entourage.

Mediators should also meet the senior officers of the Guinean military and police and give them a clear message: no more violence against civilians, no military takeover resulting in the monopolisation of the transition by the military, and the need to accept the establishment of a reform programme for the security services in association with Guinean civilians and foreign partners.

- **The creation of an international contact group.** The Chair of the AU commission, who strongly

insisted on the need to assist Guinea to achieve genuine change, when he spoke to the AU, should propose the immediate establishment of an international contact group on Guinea composed of representatives from the AU, ECOWAS and the United Nations Secretary General's Office. This group would be responsible for monitoring the political and social situation in Guinea, the implementation of the 27 January agreement and subsequent political commitments by the parties concerned, alerting the AU Peace and Security and UN Security Councils and coordinating international support for a possible Guinean working group on reform of the security services.

- **The participation of international experts in the work of the commission of inquiry.** Mandated by ECOWAS and the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, these experts would be full members of the commission of inquiry responsible for establishing the facts and identifying the direct and indirect perpetrators of the killings between 10 January and 27 January 2007 and since 9 February. This commission's report should serve as a basis for judicial proceedings. The independent investigation should also verify repeated reports of the presence of foreign forces, mercenaries or otherwise, accompanying the presidential guard during the January demonstrations in Conakry. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Guinea-Bissau could usefully co-operate with the commission. There have been several reports of the dispatch of Guinea-Bissau forces to support the red-berets of Guinea Conakry.⁶² The personal links between the Guinea-Bissau President, Joao Bernardo Nino Vieira, and Lansana Conté, who has provided him with military aid on many occasions, could explain why such assistance, which would be very dangerous for regional stability, was provided. Contrary to statements made by Ministers of Conté's outgoing government, trade union leaders would not trust an inquiry exclusively led by local actors linked to or influenced by the government.⁶³

⁶² This information, which was provided by a Guinea-Bissau military source to a journalist, was later denied by the Guinea-Bissau general staff. However, witnesses in Conakry also reported the presence of armed personnel who did not speak French during the repression of the 22 January demonstrations. See: "L'armée bissau-guinéenne vole au secours du Président Conté", IRIN, 23 January 2007, and "L'armée bissau-guinéenne dément l'envoi de troupes à Conakry", IRIN, 24 January 2007.

⁶³ See interview with Rabiataou Serah Diallo, general secretary of the CNTG, "C'est une victoire de tous les citoyens guinéens", *L'Humanité*, 31 January 2007.

- ❑ **The involvement of countries that have military cooperation agreements with Guinea.** The defence and security sector is one of the few public sectors to have benefited from sustained attempts at restructuring it in recent years, despite the decline of the state.⁶⁴ The Guinean army, including the elite corps of the presidential guard and the rangers responsible for border surveillance, has received equipment and training as part of military co-operation agreements, notably with the United States and France.⁶⁵

These countries should use privileged channels of communication gained through bilateral military cooperation to send a strong message to Guinean army officers about the unacceptability of a military takeover of government; the individual responsibility of military perpetrators of atrocities against civilians and the need to adhere to a programme of reform of the security sector with the involvement of the civilian authorities. If the principle of the creation of a working group on this question is accepted, the United States and France should contribute their expertise on the matter.

- ❑ **The organisation of a round table of donors.** In the event of the appointment of an independent Prime Minister and the formation of a broadly-based consensus government, the European Union, which is already heavily engaged in Guinea, should take the initiative and organise this round table and invite other potential bilateral and multilateral donors, including France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, Japan, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Development Programme to define the practical details for emergency financial and technical assistance in the fields of economic governance and institutional reform.

Reform of the Central Bank and the management of public finances should receive immediate attention. It should not be forgotten that popular demands for radical political change are due first

and foremost to the Conté regime's inability to provide for the basic economic needs of Guinean people. The regime's biggest crime was to plunge the country's people into poverty, despite the country's exceptional natural resources.

Political change will not be enough. The new government must quickly gain the people's confidence and give practical signs of reform of governance, provision of basic public services and the alleviation of extreme poverty. It must also organise an electoral process that may be costly but that is also very important to the country. Without significant foreign emergency aid, the broad-based consensus government will have no chance of achieving those objectives, whatever the strength of its own political will. The impatience of the people, from Conakry to N'Zérékoré could rapidly plunge the country back into disorder.

⁶⁴ See Crisis Group report, *Uncertainties at the End of an Era*, op. cit.

⁶⁵ The United States helped to train the rangers, an elite unit responsible for border surveillance, to strengthen the Guinean army's capacity to withstand attacks from Liberia, then led by Charles Taylor. Guinea protected combattants of LURD, the rebel Liberian movement opposed to Charles Taylor, in the Forest Region until Taylor's fall in 2003. France trained elements of the presidential guard in 2000/2001 and has helped to train officers and non-commissioned officers. See Crisis Group report, *Uncertainties at the End of an Era*, op. cit.

VI. CONCLUSION

The challenge to the Conté regime provided by the general strike of February 2006 was followed by the bloody turning point of the January 2007 strike and demonstrations, which were exceptionally widespread. They emerged in all regions of the country and mobilised thousands of Guineans from all the country's ethnic groups. President Conté was astonished and furious that even Kaloum commune, bastion of his ethnic group (Sosso) in the capital, joined in the challenge to the regime. It just needed thirteen days for the President to show that the 27 January agreement had been only a tactical concession. Since the 9 February presidential decree announcing the appointment of a Prime Minister unacceptable to civil society, the people have expressed their anger.

With or without Lansana Conté, the political transition must begin right away. What has changed since January is that the public has realised it can influence the course of its history. The President has a last chance to peacefully give up the reality of power, enjoy for a limited time the privileges linked to his post and ensure the security of those close to him. The patience of Guineans is now wearing thin and the spiral of the settling of accounts is under way. Chaos is not the best means of achieving positive political change for the country. Everything possible should be done to negotiate a peaceful way out of the crisis. This report proposes an action plan for urgent implementation to Guinean actors and members of the regional and international community.

Dakar/Brussels, 14 February 2007

APPENDIX A

MAP OF GUINEA



APPENDIX B

ACRONYMS

AFP	<i>Agence France-Presse</i>
ANSI	<i>Agence nationale de la stratégie et de l'intelligence</i> , the Ivorian intelligence services
AU	African Union
BCRG	<i>Banque centrale de la République de Guinée</i> (Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea)
CMIS	<i>Compagnie mobile d'intervention et de sécurité</i> (Mobile Intervention and Security Brigade)
CNOSCG	<i>Conseil National des Organisations de la Société Civile de Guinée</i> (National Forum of Guinean Civil Society Organisations)
CNTG	<i>Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée</i> (National Confederation of Guinean Workers)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
GF	Guinean franc
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, one of the two main rebel groups In Liberia's 1999-2003 war with bases in and support from Guinea
ONSLG	<i>Organisation nationale des syndicats libres de Guinée</i> (National Organisation of Guinean Free Trade Unions)
PUP	<i>Parti de l'unité et du progrès</i> (Unity and Progress Party) Président Conté's party and currently the governing party
RTG	<i>Radiotélévision guinéenne</i> (Guinea Radio and Television)
UDTG	<i>Union démocratique des travailleurs de Guinée</i> (Democratic Union of Guinean Workers)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USTG	<i>Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée</i> (Workers Union of Guinea)

APPENDIX C

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 UDTG⁶⁶

Conakry, 27 January 2007

Following the announcement of a general and indefinite strike on 2 January 2007 addressed to the government and the Guinean National Employers Association by the Inter-Trade Unions CNTG-USTG, negotiations were opened between representatives of the government, the National Employers Association and the Inter-Trade Unions CNTG-USTG, broadened to include the other trade union confederations, the ONSLG and the UDTG.

The negotiations covered proposals made by the trade unions to His Excellency the President of the Republic, Head of State, General LANSANA CONTE.

These negotiations were able to take place thanks to three successive audiences granted to the trade unions by the President of the Republic.

The negotiations were mediated by the President of the three republican institutions, namely, the National Assembly, the Supreme Court and the Economic and Social Council.

The negotiations were facilitated by religious leaders of the Guinea Christian Council and the chief imam of the Fayçal Mosque.

The negotiations dealt with the following points:

I. The creation of a broadly-based consensus government, led by a Prime Minister as head of government:

The President of the Republic agree to appoint a Prime Minister as head of government in accordance with the powers given to him by article 39 of the Fundamental Law. The draft decree setting out the powers of the Prime Minister and his letter of appointment have received the approval of the Head of State. The Prime Minister, who shall be appointed in the next few days, should be a senior and competent civilian of integrity who has in no way been implicated in malpractice

II. Respect for the constitutional principle of the separation of powers:

The parties agree to fully respect the separation of powers as enshrined in the law. To that end, the fight against corruption and the misappropriation of public funds must be a priority of the government. In this regard, the judicial proceedings already initiated against all those preying on the national economy must continue without hindrance, notably those against Mamadou SYLLA and Fodé SOUMAH.

III. Support for the purchasing power of the public and workers

(a) Regarding the reduction of the price of petrol at the pump:

The parties agree to reduce the price of petrol at the pump to GF 4,300 per litre for all petroleum products, namely petrol, diesel and paraffin. The new price takes effect on 1 February 2007.

(b) Regarding the immediate halt to the export of food, fishing and forestry products:

The Ministers for Trade, Fishing and Agriculture have already signed and issued an order prohibiting the export and re-export of food crops and agricultural, forestry, livestock and petrol products. The parties request extensive publicity and rigorous implementation of the provisions of this order. This measure is valid from January to December 2007.

⁶⁶ www.guineenews.org, le 28 janvier 2007.

- (c) Regarding the increase in the retirement pension to 80 per cent of the reference salary and its monthly payment:

The parties agree to increase the retirement pension from 60 to 70 per cent of the reference salary in 2007 and from 70 to 80 per cent in 2008. The monetary value of the indexation point used to calculate the retirement rights of civil servants shall increase from 162 to 182 points in 2007.

The gap between the monetary value of the indexation point for retired civil servants and those in active service shall be corrected before the end of 2009.

- (d) Regarding the reduction in the price of a 50 Kg sack of rice to GF 70,000 (approximately \$11 in January 2007):

The parties agreed to set the price of a 50 Kg sack of rice at GF 87,500 (approximately \$14 for the Conakry zone starting Monday 29 January 2007 and make it freely available to the whole population. In the interior of the country, the price will be higher to take account of the cost of transport (kilometres/tonnes).

The parties agree to create a permanent parity commission responsible for monitoring changes in the price of rice on the international market with a view to possible readjustments on the local market (AIO).

This commission shall be composed of representatives of the government, employers, the trade unions confederations and importers.

IV. Regarding the comprehensive implementation of the protocols of the agreement

- (a) Regarding the restoration of the value of the currency and the repatriation of currency by economic operators and mining companies:

Given the importance of this question, the parties agree to ask the Prime Minister to deal with it in accordance with the provisions of Article 8 of the draft Decree on the powers of the Prime Minister. The parties take note of the communication issued by the Minister of State, the Minister of the Economy and Finances regarding his circular of July 2006 to the Ministry of Mines and Geology about the repatriation of their turnover by the mining companies.

However, the parties agree to:

- revise the statutes of the Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea (BCRG), with a view to, among other things, changing the current composition of the Board of Directors, which shall no longer be presided over by the Governor.
- the independence of the BCRG from the Presidency of the Republic;
- the review of certain mining, fishing and forestry agreements.

The trade unions confederations and employers shall be involved in all these reviews and in future negotiations to establish new agreements.

- (b) Regarding the increase in the retirement age:

The parties agree that this question should be definitely resolved by the end of April 2007.

- (c) Regarding signature of the regulations for implementation of the special education statute:

The parties agreed that 28 of the 53 points provided for in the statute for teachers and researchers in the education system shall be implemented in 2007 and the remaining 25 in 2008.

The bonuses and allowances provided in the Special Education Statute shall be gradually introduced in 2007 and 2008 after a review of education personnel records.

- (d) Regarding the social protection of workers and the promotion of employment for young people:

The commission set up following the negotiations of March 2006 must deliver its report to the government this February 2007.

The parties invite the government and employers to introduce reliable measures and mechanisms to create and promote youth employment. They invite the Civil Service Ministry (*Ministère de la Fonction publique*) to publish the results of the recruitment examinations scheduled for March 2007.

- (e) Regarding the acceleration of the transfer of teacher contracts to the FGA. This transfer of existing contracts in the civil service must be completed before the end of the first term of 2007.
- (f) Regarding police harassment

The parties invite the government to take effective measures to put an end to police harassment at all levels.

Finally:

The parties deplore the invasion, destruction and ransacking of the Labour Exchange (*Bourse du Travail*), the occupation by the security forces of the offices of the Kindia Union of Transporters and the arbitrary arrest of trade union leaders. They request immediate withdrawal from the offices of the Kindia union and request the government and the employers to pay for the damage to the Labour Exchange.

While deploring the acts of violence, including vandalism, the numerous injuries, arrests and deaths, the parties reverently show respect to the memory of the innocent victims.

The parties invite the government to assume responsibility for caring for all the wounded. They invite the government to immediately release all those detained because of the strike, in accordance with the instructions of the President of the Republic, the Head of State.

The parties agree to establish a commission of inquiry to find and punish the perpetrators of abuses so that such acts never happen again.

The parties agree that no threat, punishment, arrest, or arbitrary transfer will be taken against any trade union leader or union member because of the strike; the wages of all workers in the public, mixed and private sectors shall be paid in full.

Signature of this agreement renders null and void any judicial procedures against trade union leaders.

The parties are delighted with the spirit of trust and responsibility that has characterised these negotiations.

The parties thank the religious authorities for their excellent support and invite them to continue to remain on standby with a view to helping prevent and resolve social conflicts in Guinea.

Signatures

CNTG, Hadja Rabiataou Serah Diallo

USTG, Dr Ibrahima Fofana

ONSLG, El Hadj Yamodou Touré

UDTG, Dr Abdoulaye Baldé

National Employers Association, El Hadj Youssouf Diallo

Government: Madikaba Camara, Minister of State for the Economy and Finances

On behalf of the mediator, the Honourable Aboubacar Somparé, President of the National Assembly

APPENDIX D

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with over 130 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by the former European Commissioner for External Relations Christopher Patten and former U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since January 2000 has been former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity), New York, London and Moscow. The organisation currently operates thirteen field offices (in Amman, Bishkek, Bogotá, Cairo, Dakar, Dushanbe, Islamabad, Jakarta, Kabul, Nairobi, Pristina, Seoul and Tbilisi), with analysts working in over 50 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents. In Africa, this includes Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, the Sahel region, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia,

Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia; in the Middle East, the whole region from North Africa to Iran; and in Latin America, Colombia, the Andean region and Haiti.

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