

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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9 May 2014

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Burkina Faso: The political party Union for Rebirth/Sankarist Movement (Union pour la Renaissance/Parti Sankariste, UNIR/PS), including structure, leadership, and membership cards; treatment of party members by the government; treatment of people who participated in a march on 18 January 2014 (2013-May 2014)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

The *Political Handbook of the World (PHW) 2013* states that the political party Union for Rebirth/Sankarist Movement (Union pour la Renaissance/Mouvement Sankariste, UNIR/MS) was formed in 2000 (*PHW* 2013, 203). In March 2009, the UNIR/MS created the Union for Rebirth/Sankarist Party (Union pour la Renaissance/Parti Sankariste, UNIR/PS) in conjunction with the Convention of Sankarist Parties [Convention des Partis Sankaristes, CPS (*ibid.*, 205)] and the Social Forces Front [Front des Forces Sociales, FFS (*ibid.*, 205)] (*ibid.*, 204). According to *PHW*,

Bénéwendé Sankara was named president of the new party's national executive secretariat, while the FFS's Nestor BASSIERE was named vice president. Sankara was also chosen by a party congress as the UNIR/PS candidate for the 2010 presidential poll. He subsequently announced the formation of a new bloc called the Consultation of the Parties of the Opposition (*Concertation des Parties de l'Opposition* - CPO) However, CPO adhesion proved elusive, and some of its prospective members supported candidates other than Sankara, who finished third in the balloting with 6.3 percent of the vote as the UNIR/PS nominee. Sankara subsequently opened an office under the rubric of Leader of the Ranks of the Political Opposition (*Chef de File de l'Opposition Politique* - CFOP), claiming the support of more than 40 parties.

In May 2011 Sankara called upon President Compaoré to resign, describing him as an "obstacle to reform." Sankara and CFOP supporters subsequently refused to participate in the CCRP [Conseil Consultatif] sur les Réformes Politiques (*ibid.*, 201)] in view of the perceived "lack of transparency" in that government-sponsored constitutional review.

In 2012 dissident members of the UNIR/PS announced the formation of the Union for Democratic Revival/Sankarist Movement (*Union pour la Renaissance Démocratique/Mouvement Sankariste* - URD/MS) under the leadership of Alphonse Marie OUEÛRAOGO. (*ibid.*)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Two sources indicate that, in the 2012 parliamentary elections, the UNIR/PS ["the second political force in opposition" (RFI 23 Dec. 2013)] obtained four seats in the National Assembly (Burkina Faso 31 Jan. 2014, 3; CAI 18 Feb. 2013). The 2013 edition of *PHW* identifies Bénéwendé Stanislas Sankara as the leader of the

UNIR/PS (*PHW* 2013, 204). Media sources also name Bénéwendé Sankara as the president of the UNIR/PS (*AllAfrica* 3 Mar. 2014; *LeFaso* 2 Mar. 2014).

Information on the structure, membership cards and the treatment of party members by the government could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Events of 18 January 2014

Article 37 of the Constitution of Burkina Faso states that the president of Burkina Faso is elected for a period of five years and can be re-elected once (*Burkina Faso* 1991, Art. 37). Media sources report that, during a 6 January 2014 press conference in Ouagadougou, the opposition parties' leaders, including the president of UNIR/PS, Bénéwendé Stanislas Sankara, invited the people of Burkina Faso to participate in a "national day of protest" on 18 January 2014 against changes to Article 37 of the Constitution (*Afrik.com* 17 Jan. 2014; *AllAfrica* 7 Jan. 2014).

Al Jazeera explains, in a January 2014 report, that

Compaore has been Burkina Faso's president since a 1987 military coup. Presidential term limits were previously extended in 2000, allowing Compaore to serve an additional two terms as president. He led a successful attempt in July to create a new senate, which opposition leaders fear will amend Article 37 of the Constitution mandating he step down at the end of his current term. (21 Jan. 2014)

Al Jazeera reports that, on 18 January 2014, thousands of peaceful demonstrators marched in cities across the country to "protest possible plans for a fifth term for long-ruling president Blaise Compaore" and to reject an extension of his 27-year rule (*ibid.*). Agence France-Presse (AFP) states that 10,000 people, according to the police, or 100,000 people, according to organizers, came out on 18 January 2014 in Ouagadougou to protest the amendment of the constitution, which would allow President Blaise Compaore to avoid stepping down in 2015 (AFP 19 Jan. 2014). According to the opposition political parties, members of civil society and trade unions, there were tens of thousands of protesters in major cities across the country, including 30,000 in the southern city of Bobo-Dioulasso and 15,000 in Koudougou, in the north of the country (*ibid.*). *Africa Confidential* writes on 21 January 2014 that

[t]ens - the opposition says hundreds - of thousands of people took to the streets of the capital and other towns over the weekend in the biggest protests for years against President Blaise Compaore. His December proposal [is] to change Article 37 of the constitution so as to remove term-limits and keep him in power proved the last straw.

One of the opposition leaders, quoted by the Reuters news agency on 18 January 2014, said that the protestors were "waiting for President Blaise Compaore to become aware of what the people are demanding today, namely the abandonment of his project to revise Article 37 of the constitution. ... If Blaise Compaore doesn't hear us, we will continue to march." According to Voice of America (VOA) news agency, "[f]ollowing the opposition-led rallies ..., the government issued a statement saying it remains open to political dialogue. Opposition leaders say they will continue their campaign to get Compaore to step down next year" (24 Jan. 2014).

Further information on the results of the protests and information on the treatment of protesters on 18 January 2014 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Opposition politique Burkina Faso - Union pour la Renaissance/Parti Sankariste.

Internet sites, including: African Elections Database; Amnesty International; British Broadcasting Corporation; Burkina Faso – Médiateur du Faso; ecoi.net; Freedom House; Global Voices Online; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; International Federation for Human Rights; International Foundation for Electoral Systems; *Jeune Afrique*; Ourcampaigns.com; Reliefweb.int; Reporters Without Borders; Thomas Sankara website; Times Live; United Nations – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld, Security Council, UN Development Programme; United States – Central Intelligence Agency, Department of State.

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