

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Gabon Monthly Briefing November 2021

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#### Gabon Summary 24 November 2021

*France-based non-governmental organisation Plateforme de Protection des Lanceurs d'Alerte en Afrique (PPLAAF) (Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa) and independent French online investigative journal Mediapart report that Gabon-based Banque Gabonaise et Française Internationale (Groupe BGFIBank SA) was used to channel at least \$138m of public funds to former Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) president Joseph Kabila (2001-2019), his family and inner circle. The Tribunal Correctionnel de Libreville (Libreville correctional court) sentences former presidential cabinet director and minister Brice Laccruche Alihanga to five years' imprisonment and a 5m FCFA (\$8,597) fine after finding him guilty of using forgery and fraudulent means to obtain administrative documents. The economy and recovery ministry reports that Gabon raised 458 billion FCFA (\$787.8m) through a Eurobond issue on 18 November and will use the funds to repay a Eurobond loan obtained in December 2013, set to mature in December 2024. President Ali Bongo Ondimba (2009-present) calls on global leaders at the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties to Climate Change (COP26) in Glasgow (United Kingdom) to pay more attention to global warming and to heed Gabon's example with respect to environmental protection. Perenco Oil & Gas Gabon, a subsidiary of Franco-British independent petroleum firm Perenco, signs two agreements with Total Gabon, subsidiary of France-based Total Energies, to purchase 37.5% of Total's interest in the Hylia II oil field and to finalise its purchase of the Cap Lopez terminal from Total for an estimated \$290m-\$350m. France-based oil company Maurel & Prom has signed an agreement with government which will see the firm give the Gabonese state \$100m in two transactions. Health minister Guy Patrick Obiang announces that Covid-19 vaccine certificates will need to be presented to access public buildings from 15 December and PCR tests will no longer be free of charge from the same date.*

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#### Data leak implicates private commercial bank in Gabon...

A report released on 19 November by France-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) **Plateforme de Protection des Lanceurs d'Alerte en Afrique (PPLAAF) (Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa)** has implicated Gabon-based commercial bank **Banque Gabonaise et Française Internationale (Groupe BGFIBank SA)**.<sup>1</sup> The report highlights that former **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** president **Joseph Kabila** (2001-2019) used BGFIBank to channel at least \$138m of public funds for himself, his family and members of his inner circle. PPLAAF and France-based independent online investigative journal **Mediapart** accessed over 3.5 million documents and exposed how DRC state funds were transferred to BGFIBank for transfer to companies owned by Kabila's close associates. A consortium of NGOs and media outlets, coordinated by the **European Investigative Collaborations (EIC)**, examined the documents for six months, and released their findings in what they have called the **Congo Hold-up**.<sup>2</sup>

The Congo Hold-up leaked documents have also exposed how the **Chinese** owners of some of DRC's prized copper and cobalt mines used BGFIBank to transfer millions of dollars to individuals and companies directly associated with Kabila's family.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the funds were siphoned through a series of shell companies. PPLAAF director **Henri Thulliez** described the leak of sensitive data as the largest in

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<sup>1</sup> Reuters, 19 Nov 2021

<sup>2</sup> Reuters, 19 Nov 2021

<sup>3</sup> East African, 19 Nov 2021

**Africa's** history, noting its detailed exposure of the tricks that the bank and its clients used to cover up endemic corruption and the flaws in the international banking system that enable such deals.

The head of BGFI's DRC subsidiary has yet to comment on the leak. DRC inspector general of finance **Jules Aligete Key** reportedly described the bank as a "mafia bank" when testifying before the EIC.<sup>4</sup> Due to the number of documents requiring analysis, 19 media organisations, including **United States (US)**-based media company **Bloomberg News**, and five NGOs across four continents will continue to publish articles on the findings over several weeks.

### Alihanga sentenced to five years in prison

The **Tribunal Correctionnel de Libreville** (Libreville correctional court) sentenced former presidential cabinet director and minister **Brice Laccruche Alihanga** on 29 October to five years' imprisonment and a 5m FCFA (\$8,597) fine after finding him guilty of using fraudulent means to obtain administrative documents that enabled him to receive Gabonese citizenship.<sup>5</sup> Alihanga's sentence is a further blow to the 41-year-old who asserted himself as Gabon's foremost political figure for the better part of 2019, following the stroke in October 2018 that left President **Ali Bongo Ondimba** (2009-present) unable to carry out presidential duties (see *ARC Briefing Gabon November 2018*).<sup>6</sup>

Alihanga's legal woes date back to 23 April, when the Libreville court informed him and his lawyer, **Anges Kevin Nzigou**, that it had served Alihanga with new charges, based on accusations that he had fraudulently procured documents, including a birth certificate and certificate of nationality.<sup>7</sup> Alihanga was born in 1980 in **Marseille (France)** to two French nationals, **Norbert Fargeon** and **Anne Dupont**, who had resided in Gabon since 1976.<sup>8</sup> Alihanga later took the surname of his stepfather, **Louis André Laccruche Alihanga**, whom his mother married following her divorce from Fargeon (see *ARC Briefing Gabon May 2021*).<sup>9</sup> Louis André Laccruche Alihanga was an adviser to former president **Omar Bongo Ondimba** (1967-2009).<sup>10</sup> In 2004, Alihanga declared that his grandfather was Gabonese and was granted citizenship on the basis of Gabonese origin.<sup>11</sup>

Alihanga's lawyer, **Jean Paul Moubembé**, appealed for the case to be thrown out, questioning the court's competence to adjudicate the matter.<sup>12</sup> In September, the **Cour de Cassation** (Court of Cassation) dismissed the appeal for the charges of forgery and the use of forgery related to his parentage to be dropped.<sup>13</sup> On 26 October, the court ascertained that Alihanga had ascribed his paternity to Louis André Laccruche Alihanga and not his biological father, Norbert Fargeon.<sup>14</sup> Alihanga senior, during a hearing with the **Direction Générale de Recherche** (national intelligence agency), confirmed that he had let Alihanga use his surname, but never formally adopted him.<sup>15</sup> Alihanga's mother also declared upon her marriage that he was not of Gabonese origin, due to his father's French nationality.<sup>16</sup> The prosecution revealed that Alihanga had made an initial request for Gabonese citizenship to the **Tribunal de Première Instance de Franceville** (Franceville Court of First Instance) in February 2004 and was granted a certificate of nationality in March of the same year. Alihanga obtained similar documents in October 2010 and September 2012.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Al Jazeera, 19 Nov 2021

<sup>5</sup> Le Nouveau Gabon, 29 Oct 2021

<sup>6</sup> Jeune Afrique, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>7</sup> Jeune Afrique, 4 May 2021

<sup>8</sup> Jeune Afrique, 29 May 2020

<sup>9</sup> Jeune Afrique, 29 May 2020

<sup>10</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>11</sup> Jeune Afrique, 29 May 2020

<sup>12</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>13</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>14</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>15</sup> Gabon Media Time, 26 Oct 2021

<sup>16</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>17</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 27 Oct 2021

Alihanga, who was present at the hearing, admitted guilt and said he would not appeal the verdict.<sup>18</sup> Moubembé pleaded for leniency in sentencing, describing Alihanga as “*a man who is suffering*”.<sup>19</sup> In delivering the verdict, presiding magistrate **Christine Toukouani** confirmed that Alihanga was guilty of violating Article 122 of the **Code Pénale** (Penal Code) and handed him the maximum sentence of five years’ imprisonment and a 5m FCFA (\$8,597) fine.<sup>20</sup>

As presidential cabinet director, Alihanga used his position while Bongo was recovering from his stroke to sideline Bongo loyalists and government moderates and appoint his allies to posts of responsibility. Alihanga undertook nationwide tours, during which he claimed he was representing the president (see *ARC Briefing Gabon January-November 2019*). Bongo’s return to the political scene in October 2019 was the start of Alihanga’s troubles. Bongo removed him from his position as director of cabinet and appointed him minister of monitoring human investment strategy and sustainable development objectives, a newly created government department (see *ARC Briefing Gabon November 2019*). Alihanga was arrested on 3 December 2019 during the second phase of the government’s anti-corruption campaign, “*Operation Scorpion*”, on charges of embezzlement of public funds and money laundering in connection with activities at state-owned **Gabon Oil Company (GOC)** (see *ARC Briefing Gabon December 2019*), amongst other crimes.

Since his arrest and detention, Alihanga has been in solitary confinement, and attempted suicide in May 2020.<sup>21</sup> His lawyers brought their client’s situation to the attention of the **United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention** and in December 2020, the UN body declared his detention as well as that of his brother, **Gregory Laccruche Alihanga**, former mayor of the commune of **Akanda**, arbitrary and called for their release.<sup>22</sup> Nzigou also planned to use further diplomatic channels by presenting Alihanga’s case to the delegate of French citizens abroad, **Brigitte Bonnaud** and the newly appointed French ambassador to Gabon, **Alexis Lamet**.<sup>23</sup>

### Gabon raises 458 billion FCFA (\$787.8m) through Eurobond Issue

Gabon raised 458 billion FCFA (\$787.8m) through a **Eurobond** issue on 18 November.<sup>24</sup> The economy and finance ministry will use the funds, obtained at an interest rate of 7% with a maturity of 10 years, to repay another Eurobond loan from 2013, worth 420 billion FCFA (\$722.4m) and set to mature in December 2024.<sup>25</sup> Gabon also successfully raised \$1.75 billion in February 2020 on international financial markets through the issue of a \$1 billion Eurobond (see *ARC Briefing Gabon February 2020*).<sup>26</sup>

The economy and recovery ministry described the Eurobond operation as a success given current global market conditions, reporting the buyout participation rate at 90%,<sup>27</sup> and said it demonstrates Gabon’s continuing attractiveness to international financial market investors.<sup>28</sup> The ministry said the transaction was concluded due to Gabon’s adoption of an **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** economic reform and financial package in July (see *ARC Briefing Gabon August 2021*),<sup>29</sup> the improved sovereign rating from CCC to B-, with a stable outlook, attributed by US-based **Fitch Ratings** (see *ARC Briefing Gabon September 2021*)<sup>30</sup> and Gabon’s readmission in October to the **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)** (see below).<sup>31</sup> The Eurobond operation was part of the government’s

<sup>18</sup> Gabon Media Time, 26 Oct 2021

<sup>19</sup> RFI, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>20</sup> Le Nouveau Gabon, 29 Oct 2021

<sup>21</sup> Jeune Afrique, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>22</sup> Le Figaro, 29 Oct 2021

<sup>23</sup> Jeune Afrique, 4 Nov 2021

<sup>24</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 18 Nov 2021

<sup>25</sup> Gabon Media Time, 19 Nov 2021

<sup>26</sup> Jeune Afrique, 4 Feb 2020

<sup>27</sup> Gabon Media Time, 19 Nov 2021

<sup>28</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 18 Nov 2021

<sup>29</sup> IMF, 28 Jul 2021

<sup>30</sup> Fitch Ratings, 24 Aug 2021

<sup>31</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 18 Nov 2021

efforts to find alternative financing of its 2021-2023 national economic agenda, **Plan d'Accélération de la Transformation (PAT)**.<sup>32</sup>

Gabonese economist **Mays Mouissi** criticised the Eurobond transaction, noting that the government is repaying the 2013 Eurobond, which was obtained at an interest rate of 6.375%.<sup>33</sup> The 2013 operation aimed to repay a 2007 Eurobond, which was set to mature in 2017 and had an interest rate of 8.3%, therefore, the 2013 arrangement was 182.5 basis points lower than the 2007 issue.<sup>34</sup> However, with the interest rate for the new loan set at 7%, taxpayers are on the hook for the 62.5 additional basis points:<sup>35</sup>

*"It increases the outstanding debt, extends maturity and increases financial burden, which absorbs an ever-growing part of the national budget."*<sup>36</sup>

Mouissi claims the government is not doing enough to live up to its promise of pursuing structural economic transformation.<sup>37</sup> The 2022 draft finance bill will see government allocate 1,169 billion FCFA (\$2 billion) of the annual budget (around 40%) to debt repayment, while 326 billion FCFA (\$560.7m) (11%) will be dedicated to investment.<sup>38</sup> Mouissi says the significant debt contracted by Gabon has not led to an improvement in public service delivery.<sup>39</sup>

In a 22 November interview with state-owned daily **l'Union**, economy and recovery minister **Nicole Janine Roboty Mbou** described Mouissi's remarks as unfair, saying the current state of the international financial markets differs from when the earlier bond issues took place.<sup>40</sup> Roboty Mbou cited the continued impact of Covid-19 on the global economy and increased interest rates in the US, which have made the markets difficult to navigate. Roboty Mbou said the average interest rate is currently around 7.5% for emerging countries, but Gabon was able to negotiate it down to 7%.<sup>41</sup> Roboty Mbou said the government is not compromising its investment strategy, and the loans are part of an "*active debt management strategy*" that aims to reduce short- to medium-term risks.<sup>42</sup> Roboty Mbou said the government will continue to seek financial assistance from its technical and financial partners because Gabon has established credibility in the international arena.<sup>43</sup>

The IMF as well as government officials have expressed concern over Gabon's public debt over the past few years (see *ARC Briefing Gabon August 2021*). However, the **Direction Générale de la Dette (DGD)** (general debt directorate) reported on 10 November that Gabon borrowed 432.1 billion (\$743.4m) during the first half of 2021, a 49.2% year-on-year decrease.<sup>44</sup> External financing from multilateral institutions saw an 84.6% reduction, while loans from bilateral partners fell by 15.4%.<sup>45</sup> Gabonese authorities have reportedly established a working group to examine the nature of Gabon's external debt.<sup>46</sup> The task force, headed by French legal expert **Pierre Duro**, a former employee of defunct France-based oil giant **Elf**, will take steps to verify Gabon's external debt commitments.<sup>47</sup> A similar initiative, launched in June 2020 to assess Gabon's internal debt, led to the recovery of 241

<sup>32</sup> Gabon Media Time, 19 Nov 2021

<sup>33</sup> Gabon Review, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>34</sup> Financial Afrik, 22 Nov 2021

<sup>35</sup> Gabon Review, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>36</sup> Financial Afrik, 22 Nov 2021

<sup>37</sup> Gabon Review, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>38</sup> Gabon Review, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>39</sup> Gabon Review, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>40</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 22 Nov 2021

<sup>41</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 22 Nov 2021

<sup>42</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 22 Nov 2021

<sup>43</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 22 Nov 2021

<sup>44</sup> Gabon Review, 10 Nov 2021

<sup>45</sup> Gabon Review, 10 Nov 2021

<sup>46</sup> Gabon Review, 10 Nov 2021

<sup>47</sup> Gabon Review, 10 Nov 2021

billion FCFA (\$413.9m) in falsely claimed domestic debt (see *ARC Briefing Gabon October-November 2020*).<sup>48</sup>

### Bongo calls on world leaders pay more attention to climate change

President Ali Bongo Ondimba attended the **World Leaders Summit in Glasgow (United Kingdom)**, while participating at the 26<sup>th</sup> **Conference of Parties to Climate Change (COP26)**<sup>49</sup> in his capacity as chair of the **African Group of Negotiators** at COP26.<sup>50</sup> During his speech on 1 November, Bongo called on global leaders to increase efforts to combat global warming, describing the initiatives carried out until present as “*insufficient*”.<sup>51</sup> Bongo decried the scourge of illegal logging and pleaded for the implementation of policies for the financing, management and protection of forests with respect to illegal logging across the world.<sup>52</sup> Bongo said Gabon, which environmental minister **Lee White** says has an estimated 88% of its surface area covered by rainforest, has passed innovative environmental laws that other countries should emulate.<sup>53</sup>

Before his intervention at COP26, Bongo urged at the 5<sup>th</sup> **Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia)** from 26-28 October for greater investment in the green economy as Gabon prepares for a post-oil economic transition.<sup>54</sup> Gabon has already taken steps to capitalise on the green economy. In June it received \$17m from the **Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI)** to reduce deforestation, and it will receive a total of \$150m over the next 10 years from the institution for its environmental protection efforts (see *ARC Briefing Gabon July 2021*).<sup>55</sup> The government in June authorised the **African Conservation Development Group (ACDG)** to sustainably develop 700,000 hectares of land in a project that will see an investment of 137.2 billion FCFA (\$246.8m) over the next five years.<sup>56</sup>

White claims that Gabon can derive significant economic gain from adding value to its environmental protection efforts and said it would try to raise \$5 billion in carbon credits.<sup>57</sup> **Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux du Gabon (ANPN)** (national parks agency) head **Vincent Medjibe** says Gabon absorbs 140m tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> and emits 40m tonnes, making it one of the few countries with a positive absorption balance.<sup>58</sup> This could help Gabon’s efforts to benefit financially from the environment. **Conseil National du Climat** (national climate council) head **Tanguy Gahouna** notes that the predominance of oil activity in Gabon has prevented excess logging.<sup>59</sup> However, Gahouna warned that this scenario could change amid depleting hydrocarbons reserves, and that Gabon is not being sufficiently compensated for its conservation efforts.<sup>60</sup> Former president Bongo created 13 national parks, which make up close to 11% of Gabon’s surface area, demonstrating executive commitment to environmental protection.<sup>61</sup> The May 2019 discovery of 355 containers of illegally logged kevangongo hardwood, worth an estimated \$250m, led to the dismissal of vice-president **Pierre Claver Maganga Moussavou** and forestry ministry **Guy Bertrand Mapangou** (see *ARC Briefing Gabon May 2019*).<sup>62</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Gabon Review, 10 Nov 2021

<sup>49</sup> Gabon Review, 2 Nov 2021

<sup>50</sup> Al Jazeera, 26 Oct 2021

<sup>51</sup> Gabon Review, 2 Nov 2021

<sup>52</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 3 Nov 2021

<sup>53</sup> Al Jazeera, 26 Oct 2021

<sup>54</sup> Gabon Review, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>55</sup> Bloomberg, 25 Jun 2021

<sup>56</sup> Gabon Review, 24 Jun 2021

<sup>57</sup> Al Jazeera, 26 Oct 2021

<sup>58</sup> Jeune Afrique, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>59</sup> Jeune Afrique, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>60</sup> Jeune Afrique, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>61</sup> Jeune Afrique, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>62</sup> RFI, 9 May 2019

## Perenco and Total sign asset transfer agreements...

Despite Bongo's call for greater investment in the green economy, Gabon continues to be reliant on investment in its oil sector. **Perenco Oil & Gas Gabon**, a subsidiary of **Franco-British** independent petroleum firm **Perenco**, on 11 November signed amendment no.3 to the **Establishment Agreement of July 12 2021**, with **Total Gabon**, a subsidiary of France-based **Total Energies**.<sup>63</sup> According to the agreement, Total will transfer 37.5% of its interest in the **Hylia II** oil field, contained in exploitation and production sharing contract (CEPP) No.65-113, which will also see Perenco become operator of Hylia II within the framework of the contract.<sup>64</sup> The contract also will see Perenco intensify investments in mature fields.<sup>65</sup>

Perenco director general **Adrien Broche** said Perenco will make substantial investments in drill and modernisation with the aim of producing more oil and gas.<sup>66</sup> The company plans to launch investments at the **Cap Lopez** terminal to modernise it and make it sustainable, starting in 2022. Broche noted that the new agreement fits in with the group's vision that there are endless resources in what already exists:

*"It is better to take over, redevelop, renovate, modernise existing facilities and existing fields than to throw away and rebuild."*<sup>67</sup>

Total Gabon director general **Stéphane Bassene**, Gabon's petroleum minister, **Vincent de Paul Massassa**, and economy and recovery minister Nicole Janine Roboty Mbou were also present to finalise the agreement.<sup>68</sup> Massassa noted the agreement is part of Gabon's energy transition:

*"Through gas we have in particular the greenhouse gas reduction requirements through flared gas that we had which will now be recovered and put back into the circuit for the manufacture of LPG by Perenco."*<sup>69</sup>

Perenco and Total signed an amendment on 16 November finalising Total's sale of the Cap Lopez terminal to Perenco.<sup>70</sup> The estimated value of the sale varies between \$290m-\$350m.<sup>71</sup> The deal was reached in July, when Total agreed to sell its ownership in seven maturing offshore oil fields as well as its interests and role as main operator of the Cap Lopez oil terminal (see *ARC Briefing Gabon August 2020*).<sup>72</sup> According to the amendment, Perenco will invest an undisclosed amount in the terminal to ensure it can handle activities such as storage and export of crude oil.<sup>73</sup>

## ... as Maurel & Prom allocates \$100m to Gabonese state

France-based oil company **Maurel & Prom** reported on its website on 5 November that it had signed an agreement with the Gabonese government which will see the firm give the Gabonese state \$100m in two transactions.<sup>74</sup> The deals are important developments for Gabon's hydrocarbons sector. Perenco is increasingly consolidating its position as a leading player in the sector in Gabon, after it signed three CEPPs in February 2020 (see *ARC Briefing Gabon February 2020*). The first financial allocation will be the placement of \$40m in an escrow account for the benefit of the Gabonese state, in relation to costs incurred before 2018 at the **Ezanga** permit, in which Maurel & Prom has an 80%

<sup>63</sup> Gabon Review, 11 Nov 2021

<sup>64</sup> Gabon Actu, 11 Nov 2021

<sup>65</sup> Gabon Actu, 11 Nov 2021

<sup>66</sup> Gabon Media Time, 14 Nov 2021

<sup>67</sup> Gabon Actu, 11 Nov 2021

<sup>68</sup> Gabon Review, 11 Nov 2021

<sup>69</sup> Gabon Actu, 11 Nov 2021

<sup>70</sup> Le Nouveau Gabon, 16 Nov 2021

<sup>71</sup> Le Nouveau Gabon, 16 Nov 2021

<sup>72</sup> Energy Voice, 30 Jul 2021

<sup>73</sup> Le Nouveau Gabon, 16 Nov 2021

<sup>74</sup> Gabon Review, 5 Nov 2021

ownership stake.<sup>75</sup> Maurel & Prom will make an additional payment of \$57m to the state.<sup>76</sup> The agreement also stipulates an amendment to the exploration, production and sharing contract (CEPP) for the permit, extending the exploration period until 2026,<sup>77</sup> and allows for the signing of CEPPs for the **Kari** and **Nyanga-Mayombe** zones.<sup>78</sup> These offshore permits are 100% owned by Maurel & Prom, with their exploration periods valid until 2029.<sup>79</sup> Maurel & Prom CEO **Olivier de Langavant** said the agreement is mutually beneficial for all parties involved and demonstrates the company's long-term commitment to operations in Gabon.<sup>80</sup>

Another positive development for Gabon's hydrocarbons sector was the country's confirmation of re-admission to the **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)** on 21 October.<sup>81</sup> EITI is a non-governmental organisation that aims to support countries to strengthen transparency in the extractive industries value chain from contracts to licences, and expects them to submit regular reports to that end.<sup>82</sup> Gabon was initially admitted to EITI in May 2004 but removed in February 2013 for failing to file its report. Gabon has until 21 April 2023 to submit its next EITI report.<sup>83</sup>

### Covid vaccine certificates required to access public buildings as third wave eases

Health minister **Dr. Guy Patrick Obiang** announced several new restrictive measures on 27 October. From 15 December, individuals not vaccinated against Covid-19 will no longer be permitted to access public places including administrative buildings, businesses, restaurants and snack bars.<sup>84</sup> Presentation of vaccination certificates or a negative PCR test will be required to gain entry to these establishments.<sup>85</sup> Vaccinated individuals will be exempt from curfew restrictions.<sup>86</sup>

Transport minister **Brice Constant Palliat** declared that commercial airline firms will henceforth be allowed to operate five flights weekly, an increase from two weekly flights.<sup>87</sup> Palliat added that international passengers will be screened upon arrival, while unvaccinated individuals will be placed under mandatory five-day quarantine.<sup>88</sup> Individuals vaccinated against Covif-19 will not require special authorisation to travel to the interior of the country, while unvaccinated persons will have to present a negative PCR test valid for 14 days, according to interior minister **Lambert Mbatha**.<sup>89</sup> Obiang also revealed that PCR tests would no longer be administered for between 20,000 FCFA (\$34) and 50,000 FCFA (\$85).<sup>90</sup>

The measures have drawn criticism from lawmakers and civil society actors alike. On 3 November, **Dynamique Unitaire** trade union, through its vice president **Roger Ondo Abessolo**, called for the organisation of a nationwide boycott on 15 December, as a show of protest against the new directives.<sup>91</sup> On the same day, the **Cercle des Libérateurs Réformateurs** civil society group suggested that categorising residents as vaccinated and unvaccinated will create division in society.<sup>92</sup> During Obiang's presentation of the 2022 health ministry budget to the budget and finance committee

<sup>75</sup> Gabon Media time, 14 Nov 2021

<sup>76</sup> Gabon Review, 5 Nov 2021

<sup>77</sup> Gabon Review, 5 Nov 2021

<sup>78</sup> Gabon Media time, 14 Nov 2021

<sup>79</sup> Gabon Review, 5 Nov 2021

<sup>80</sup> Gabon Media time, 14 Nov 2021

<sup>81</sup> Financial Afrik, 26 Oct 2021

<sup>82</sup> Gabon Media Time, 22 Oct 2021

<sup>83</sup> Financial Afrik, 26 Oct 2021

<sup>84</sup> Gabon Review, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>85</sup> Gabon Review, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>86</sup> Gabon Review, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>87</sup> Gabon Review, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>88</sup> Gabon Review, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>89</sup> Gabon Review, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>90</sup> Gabon Review, 27 Oct 2021

<sup>91</sup> Gabon Review, 3 Nov 2021

<sup>92</sup> Gabon Media Time, 3 Nov 2021

of the **Assemblée Nationale** (national assembly) on 9 November, MPs present objected to PCR tests no longer being a free service.<sup>93</sup>

During a 9 November press conference, Obiang expressed satisfaction with respect to the decreasing infection rate across the country, noting that from 1-7 November Gabon registered 483 new cases of Covid-19, compared to 953 the week before and 1,056 cases two weeks previously.<sup>94</sup> Obiang said the rise in cases was due to Gabon experiencing a third wave of Covid-19 infections since the start of October, due to the presence of the so-called “*Delta variant*”.<sup>95</sup> Obiang suggested Gabon had reached its peak infection rate and expressed satisfaction with the country’s vaccination rate.<sup>96</sup>

As of 18 November, 161,795 individuals out of an estimated population of 2.2 million persons had received the Covid-19 vaccination.<sup>97</sup> However, despite the availability of **China**-manufactured **Sinopharm** and US-manufactured **Johnson & Johnson** and **Pfizer** vaccines, many are still reluctant to receive the vaccines amid rumours that vaccination can cause sterility.<sup>98</sup> As of 21 November, Gabon had recorded 37,158 positive cases, 31,282 recoveries and 274 deaths from Covid-19.<sup>99</sup>

## Planner

17-19 Dec 2021 **Istanbul (Turkey) Turkey-Africa Summit**

29-30 Nov 2021 **Dakar (Senegal) Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)**

2023 (**Gabon**) Local and national assembly elections

## Chronology

19 Nov 2021 **Paris (France) PPLAAF**. A report released on 19 November by **France**-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) **Plateforme de Protection des Lanceurs d'Alerte en Afrique (PPLAAF) (Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa)** has implicated **Gabon**-based commercial bank **Banque Gabonaise et Française Internationale (Groupe BGFIBank SA)** in corrupt dealings with the family of former **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** president **Joseph Kabila**;

18 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon) Direct Infos Gabon**. Gabon raises 458 billion FCFA through the issue of a **Eurobond** with a 10-year maturity and 7% yield rate;

17 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon) Gabon Media Time**. The **Société Autoroutière du Gabon (SAG)** has obtained a 65 billion FCFA (\$111.3m) loan from the **Banque de Développement des États de l'Afrique Centrale (BDEAC) (Central African Development Bank)** for the construction of the 780 km **Transgabonaise** highway;

14 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon) Gabon Review**. **Paulette Missambo** is elected president of the opposition **Union Nationale (UN)**;

11 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon) Direct Infos Gabon**. Government daily **l'Union** reports an estimated 3 billion FCFA (\$5.2m) was embezzled through the execution of a project that saw 5,000 solar lamps installed across the capital Libreville by the **Agence Nationale des Grands Travaux d'Infrastructures (ANGTI)** (large scale works agency)

<sup>93</sup> Gabon Review, 10 Nov 2021

<sup>94</sup> Gabon Media Time, 12 Nov 2021

<sup>95</sup> Gabon Media Time, 12 Nov 2021

<sup>96</sup> Gabon Media Time, 12 Nov 2021

<sup>97</sup> Infocovid.ga, 20 Nov 2021

<sup>98</sup> RFI, 31 Oct 2021

<sup>99</sup> Infocovid.ga, 23 Nov 2021

11 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Gabon Review*. **Total Gabon**, subsidiary of France-based **Total Energies**, signs an agreement to transfer its 37.5% share in the **Hylia II** field to **Perenco Gabon**, subsidiary of **Franco-British** firm **Perenco**;

10 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Gabon Review*. The presidency has reportedly established a task force to evaluate the country's external debt;

10 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Le Nouveau Gabon*. France-based oil company **Maurel & Prom** (M&P) has signed several agreements with the Gabonese government, in terms of which M&P will make immediate payment of \$100m to Gabon for costs related to the **Ezanga** licence, which the Gabonese government has extended until 2026, and including exploration and production agreements for the **Kari** and **Nyanga-Mayombé** offshore oil deposits

8 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Gabon Review*. Italy-based petroleum firm **ENI** expresses interest in partially or completely selling its shares in the **D3** and **D4** offshore gas blocks;

4 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Gabon Review*. Former presidential cabinet director **Brice Laccruche Alihanga** says he will not appeal the five-year prison sentence and 5m FCFA (\$8,848) fine he received from the **Tribunal Correctionnel de Libreville** (Libreville correctional court) on charges of forgery and use of forgery related to lying about the identity of his father;

4 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Direct Infos Gabon*. The **Direction Générale de la Dette** (DGD) (general debt directorate) reports that the Gabonese state obtained 432.1 billion FCFA (\$763.7m) in loans from January to June 2021, a 49.2% year-on-year decrease;

3 Nov 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Direct Infos Gabon*. The **Direction Générale de la Comptabilité Publique et du Trésor** (DGCPT) (general directorate of public accounting and treasury) reports that Gabon collected 791.7 billion FCFA (\$1.3 billion) in revenue from January to June, compared to 882.5 billion FCFA (\$1.5 billion) during the same period in 2020;

29 Oct 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Le Nouveau Gabon*. **Tribunal Correctionnel de Libreville** (Libreville correctional court) sentences former presidential cabinet director **Brice Laccruche Alihanga** to five years' imprisonment and a 5m FCFA (\$8,848) fine after convicting him on charges of forgery and use of forgery related to lying about the identity of his father, which enabled him to obtain Gabonese nationality;

28 Oct 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Direct Infos Gabon*. The **Direction Générale de la Comptabilité Publique et du Trésor** (DGCPT) (general directorate of public accounts and the Treasury) reports that Gabon generated 230.8 billion FCFA (\$408.3m) in oil revenue during the first semester of 2021, a 15.1% year-on-year decrease;

27 Oct 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Direct Infos Gabon*. Public health minister **Guy-Patrick Obiang Ndong** announces that as of 15 December, all unvaccinated persons and those not presenting negative PCR tests will be banned from accessing public places;

25 Oct 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Gabon Review*. **Gabon Special Economic Zone** (GSEZ), subsidiary of **Singapore**-based agro-industrial giant **Olam**, reports it created 4,500 jobs between 2019 and 2020;

23 Oct 2021 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Le Nouveau Gabon*. **Bermuda**-headquartered oil and gas company **BW Energy** has brought into production the **Gamba DTM-7H** and **DTM-6H** wells, which **BW Energy** CEO **Carl K. Arnet** says will produce 18,000 b/pd;

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