

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Guinea Monthly Briefing February 2015

Guinea Summary 9 February 2015

President Alpha Condé (2010-present) pledges to hold the presidential election in 2015 as scheduled and to allow election observers. However, Condé seeks more funding and political support before committing to an election date. Tensions between the government and opposition also increase due to the lack of dialogue and reform of the electoral apparatus. Local resistance to health authorities allows the Ebola outbreak to persist in Guinea, despite a significant reduction of new cases in January. Condé calls for increased donor funding and debt relief to re-launch the economy post-Ebola. The Senegalese government reopens its land border with Guinea.

Condé looks towards elections

Tensions between the government and the opposition continue to increase over the organisation of the presidential and local elections due in 2015. On 5 February, the foreign ministry released a press statement that it has renewed negotiations with international partners, notably **European** ambassadors, concerning the elections. The statement included the government's "*strong commitment*" to holding presidential elections in 2015 "*according to the constitution*". The **International Crisis Group (ICG)** says the government should hold the local elections – originally scheduled in early 2014 – at least three months before the presidential election to allow the local representatives to settle in their new positions.

*"Holding the elections this year could be a good move for [President Alpha] Condé [2010-present] ...to say that this is the system we have, we are going to stick to the constitution. Condé is tempted because delaying the election could provide the opposition with a rallying call. But Condé wants to keep his options open for now."*¹

The foreign ministry statement also claimed that the government planned to work with international partners to "*mobilise resources*" for the elections and allow international election monitors. This is despite Condé's statements to the press in December that the government planned to finance the election from the budget, which led to opposition claims that the government wanted to avoid international election observers and scrutiny of the election.²

The foreign ministry said that it plans to renew dialogue with the opposition, however the government has yet to initiate the process. The ICG has urged Condé to start dialogue, "*in which the two parties should suggest precise, comprehensive and realistic measures*".³ It also pressed Condé to restructure the **Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI)** based on equal representation and ensure consensus decision-making. The ICG and several "Guinea watchers" have also called on Condé to allow international election monitors and a prior evaluation mission to ensure a fair electoral process.⁴ Condé and the government maintain their control of the electoral apparatus:

*"They have not addressed the concerns raised following the 2013 legislative elections...this puts Condé in a good position to win the next election."*⁵

¹ Source, political and security researcher, Guinea

² See ARC Guinea January 2015 Briefing

³ ICG, 15 Dec 2014.

⁴ See ARC Guinea January 2015 Briefing

⁵ Source, foreign correspondent, Guinea

Condé is focused on securing donor funding and regional support to improve his prospects of winning another term in power. In January, he received several **African** leaders in **Conakry**, including **South African** president, **Jacob Zuma** (2009-present), **Mauritanian** president, **Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz** (2009 – present), **Nigerien** president, **Mahamadou Issoufou** (2011-present) and **Beninese** president, **Thomas Boni Yayi** (2006-present).⁶

*"Condé clearly wants more funding and political support before announcing the elections. But this is a club of guys who also have problems at home. He wants to make sure he has their support when needed...in the event of an electoral dispute."*⁷

With elections nearing, the risk of opposition-led street unrest is on the increase. Between 2 - 4 February riots in the opposition stronghold, **Labé**, in **Middle Guinea** resulted in injuries to 24 security forces personnel and 25 civilians.⁸ A government attempt to move civil servants in Labé to other areas of the country reportedly triggered the protests.

...as local resistance allows the Ebola outbreak to persist

The Ebola outbreak persists in Guinea. International and local healthcare authorities said that the year-long outbreak had reached a turning point in mid-January as the incidence of new cases recorded reduced significantly in the three affected countries of Guinea, **Liberia** and **Sierra Leone**. However, in the week to 1 February the **World Health Organization (WHO)** said the number of new cases increased in all three countries for the first time in 2015: Guinea recorded 39 new cases, increasing from 30 the previous week; Sierra Leone recorded 80, up from 65; and Liberia recorded five, up from four. The **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** subsequently said the virus is "*flaring up*" in new areas and cases remain unreported.⁹ In Guinea the outbreak continues to spread to new regions. In late January, the WHO confirmed the first case in the prefecture of **Mali** in northern Guinea bordering **Senegal**, while **Boffa** north of Conakry recorded its first cases since June 2014. The outbreak remains present in 23 of the 66 prefectures in the three countries.¹⁰

Resistance to health authorities due to mistrust and misinformation as well as the ongoing practice of traditional burials continue to hinder the response effort, particularly in Guinea. **Fode Tass Sylla**, spokesman for the government's anti-Ebola taskforce, claims that the recent increase in cases was due to the authorities gaining access to some remote villages previously resistant to assistance.¹¹ The government claims health officials previously had no access to 36 villages mainly in the **Forestière Region** – the outbreak's ground zero – but also in other areas close to the Sierra Leone and Liberia borders, including **Forécariah**.¹² Moreover, Sylla contends that resistance to assistance is widespread in Guinea, saying that the "*same kind of situation*" occurred in suburbs of the capital, Conakry.¹³ On 30 January, the ICRC also said it still had "*no access*" to some communities in Guinea. This has impeded authorities in tracking transmission lines. For example, in the week to 18 January the WHO claimed that only 30% of new cases in Guinea came from "*registered contacts*". The ICRC's Ebola coordinator **Birte Hald** said:

*"If we don't get full access in Guinea, then we definitely risk that this will become something permanent. If it's permanent in Guinea, then we know also that it will be in the whole region, because there are porous borders."*¹⁴

Screening at borders between the three countries and tracking cross-border cases remains weak:

⁶ Les Afriques, 6 Jan and 13 Jan 2015.

⁷ Source, political and security researcher, Guinea

⁸ Reuters, 4 Feb 2015.

⁹ Reuters, 30 Jan 2015.

¹⁰ Jeune Afrique, 30 Jan 2015.

¹¹ Reuters, 6 Feb 2015.

¹² Reuters, 6 Feb 2015.

¹³ Reuters, 6 Feb 2015.

¹⁴ Reuters, 30 Jan 2015.

*"There is little collaboration between the authorities. They are still not successfully tracking cross-border cases. This is a big factor in the question of how long is the end game."*¹⁵

Local resistance to health authorities has led to several security incidents in Guinea. The WHO claims that at least one security incident or a form of refusal to cooperate was recorded in 27 sub-prefectures in Guinea in the week to 21 January. In Sierra Leone, four districts recorded at least one similar incident, as well as two districts in Liberia. The ICRC also recorded "*quite a number of incidents*" in January.¹⁶ **AFP** recorded the most significant incident in **Dar-es-Salaam**, a village in the west of the country, in which a mob killed two local officials in mid-January.¹⁷ The residents had accused the victims of infecting a local healer after they gave him a sedative to relieve an unknown illness.

*"There remains a strong wariness of outsiders and locals view authorities' attempts as an attack on local traditions and practices of secret societies. The recent spike in cases is related to this."*¹⁸

There are also indications of a wider political element to the resistance:

*"It's difficult to say if these resistant villages are opposition strongholds. But at least at the start of the outbreak some of the resistant villages were aligned to the opposition. The authorities have also said that the local opposition officials have exploited Ebola."*¹⁹

International donors have called for a further \$1 billion to mobilise resources to help eradicate the outbreak.²⁰ WHO said the response faces a funding shortfall and it will run out of funds in mid-February. Local and international authorities agree that there is a crucial "*window of opportunity*" in February and March before the rainy season starts in April and May, which will limit access and ability to trace transmission lines.²¹ However, the Guinean government is unlikely to meet a 60-day deadline set on 10 January to eradicate Ebola. The ICRC says that the outbreak will probably continue for the rest of 2015. The WHO says that unless the international community mobilises funds and aid workers before the start of the rainy season, it might take up to another year to end the outbreak.

...and Condé calls on donors to assist the economic recovery

The government has called for increased donor funding and debt relief to relaunch the economy post-Ebola. **David Nabarro**, the **United Nations** Ebola response head, said that an additional \$4 billion – equivalent to the amount of aid committed since the start of the outbreak – is required to "*help these countries to get back to the economic trajectory they had*".²² On 5 February, the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** announced that it would provide \$100m in debt relief for the three affected countries, and consider another \$160m in loans for the economic recovery.²³ In December, Condé had urged the IMF and other lenders to cancel debt to assist the economic recovery.²⁴

The economy remains at a standstill and business travel to Conakry has not resumed. However, key business players are preparing to renew operations in Guinea. On 6 February, **Rio Tinto** said it would restart construction projects related to the **Simandou South** iron ore and infrastructure project.²⁵ Rio Tinto reduced staff levels in August due to the Ebola outbreak. It said that a feasibility study for the project should be completed in 2015. **Tullow Oil** is also reportedly planning to resume work at its oil exploration project.²⁶

¹⁵ Source, foreign correspondent, Guinea

¹⁶ Reuters, 30 Jan 2015.

¹⁷ AFP, 14 Jan 2015.

¹⁸ Source, foreign correspondent, Guinea

¹⁹ Source, political and security researcher, Guinea

²⁰ David Nabarro, the United Nations' special envoy for Ebola, said the WHO, Unicef and the World Food Programme need the \$1 billion

²¹ Dr. Peter Salama, global Ebola emergency coordinator for the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF),

²² Reuters, 21 Jan 2015.

²³ IMF, 5 Feb 2015.

²⁴ AFP, 1 Jan 2015.

²⁵ Bloomberg, 6 Feb 2015.

²⁶ Africa Intelligence, 3 Feb 2015.

With Ebola waning, and before the recent spike in cases, on 20 January the **World Bank** estimated that the Ebola outbreak would reduce gross domestic product (GDP) in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone by \$1.6 billion in 2015. The World Bank estimates Guinea will lose \$540m in GDP in 2015.

Senegal reopens land border with Guinea

Trade with Senegal has improved following the reopening of Guinea's northern border with Senegal. On 26 January, the Senegalese interior ministry announced the reopening of the border.²⁷ The Senegalese government closed the border in August to prevent the spread of Ebola. On 17 November, the Senegalese government removed a ban on air and maritime traffic with Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.²⁸ Senegal recorded a single case of Ebola, a student who entered Senegal at the Guinea border, in late August. However, the Senegalese authorities successfully prevented an outbreak in the country. The WHO declared Senegal Ebola-free on 17 October.

The border closure strained relations between the two countries and undermined significant cross-border trade.²⁹ The Senegalese authorities refused to reopen the border after the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** called for a removal of restrictions on the movement of people and goods in November. Condé subsequently accused Senegal of "*stigmatising*" Guinea.³⁰ However, Dakar has been a vital link in the international Ebola response effort. The government opened a "*humanitarian corridor*" for **World Food Programme (WFP)** flights in September.³¹ Dakar's port is also a logistics base for the response effort.

Implications

The political environment will follow a trend of increased instability and unrest around elections. Despite the foreign ministry statements Condé has not shown commitment to reform the electoral process. Opposition protests will heighten in the lead up to the vote unless Condé opens political dialogue and awards the opposition concessions to improve transparency of the vote. However, Guinea's recent history indicates that the government and opposition will require the help of international mediation for this to occur. If Condé announces elections without some consensus agreement, opposition-led street unrest will become increasingly violent around the election.

Local resistance to authorities indicates that the Ebola outbreak will probably persist into the second half of 2015. The resistance stems from both a strong connection to traditional beliefs in the Forestière Region and the mistrust of government. The upcoming rainy season as well as weak screening at borders and detection of cross-border cases will also impede the response effort. Thus, the Ebola outbreak will continue to undermine economic activity, particularly since the situation has not improved to the extent that business travel to Conakry has resumed. In addition, increasing political tensions around the organisation of the elections will probably result in increased Ebola-related security incidents.

However, the reopening of the land border with Senegal will improve trade and diplomatic relations with Senegal. The border closure halted one of the most important trade routes in the region.

²⁷ Reuters, 26 Jan 2015.

²⁸ See ARC Senegal November 2014 Briefing

²⁹ RFI, 26 Jan 2015.

³⁰ RFI, 26 Jan 2015.

³¹ See ARC Senegal November 2014 Briefing