

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Guinea Monthly Briefing July 2024

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#### Guinea Summary 26 July 2024

*Opposition coalition Front national pour la défense de la constitution (FNDC) announces on 10 July that gendarmes and soldiers arrested its leaders, Oumar Sylla (also known as Foniké Menguè) and Mamadou Billo Bah, on 9 July. Government spokesperson Ousmane Gaoual Diallo confirms on 24 July that only the constitutional referendum will be organised by the end of 2024, once again affirming that Guinea's return to constitutional rule has been delayed. However, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) welcomes the progress that has been made. Australia-headquartered Rio Tinto announces on 16 July that its Simandou iron ore project has received all the required regulatory approvals, including from the Guinean and Chinese governments.*

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#### Opposition leaders disappear

The opposition coalition **Front national pour la défense de la constitution (FNDC)** announced on 10 July that gendarmes and soldiers had arrested its leaders – **Oumar Sylla** (also known as **Foniké Menguè**) and **Mamadou Billo Bah** – on 9 July.<sup>1</sup> The FNDC confirmed the two leaders were at Sylla's home at the time of the arrest, which they called “*a kidnapping*”. The FNDC reported that the two were beaten and taken to **Ile Kassa**, an island off the coast of **Guinea**. The arrests came after Sylla called for Guineans to wear red clothes on 11 July in protest against the suspension of media outlets, the high cost of living and the prolonged transition back to democratic rule.<sup>2</sup>

This is not the first time the two leaders have been arrested. Sylla was detained under former president **Alpha Condé** (2010-2021) and again under the ruling **Comité national du rassemblement et du développement (CNRD)** junta between July 2022 and May 2023. Bah was detained between January 2023 and May 2023. The FNDC in February 2023 announced a march in greater Conakry to demand the release of the two leaders, which turned violent and at least two people were killed in clashes with security forces (*see ARC Briefing Guinea Feb 2023*). The two leaders were released in May 2023.

The latest arrest of the two leaders has drawn international condemnation. **United Nations (UN)** special rapporteur on human rights **Mary Lawlor** said on 10 July she is very concerned by their detention.<sup>3</sup> **United Kingdom (UK)**-based **Amnesty International's West and Central Africa** director, **Samira Daoud**, also called for their immediate release on 11 July.<sup>4</sup> An Amnesty International report published in May reported that the CNRD has stepped up its crackdown on peaceful dissent, suspending media outlets, restricting internet access and repressing demonstrations, often violently. Amnesty International believes at least 47 people have died in demonstrations since the junta took power in September 2021.

Facing pressure, the attorney general's office on 17 July issued a statement acknowledging “*persistent reports*” of the kidnapping of the two men. It said no investigative body has made any arrests or inquiries into them and that no penitentiary facility is holding them.<sup>5</sup> The statement came after lawyers announced they would strike for two weeks to protest what they call arbitrary arrests in

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<sup>1</sup> Jeune Afrique, 11 Jul 2024

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, 11 Jul 2024

<sup>3</sup> Africa Guinee, 11 Jul 2024

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, 11 Jul 2024

<sup>5</sup> Jeune Afrique, 18 Jul 2024

Guinea.<sup>6</sup> The FNDC on 20 July published the testimony of **Mohamed Cissé**, who was reportedly taken alongside Sylla and Bah before being released. Cissé said they were subjected to torture and he was hospitalised upon his release.<sup>7</sup>

FNDC's French lawyers, **William Bourdon**, **Bertrand Repolt** and **Vincent Brengarth**, filed a complaint with French courts on behalf of Sylla and Bah's wives on 22 July.<sup>8</sup> Prior to this, Bourdon and Brengarth also contacted the **International Criminal Court's (ICC)** office of the prosecutor, **Karim Khan**. As of 26 July, no further information on the two has been released. Prime minister **Bah Oury**, a former human rights activist, commented on the situation on 25 July, noting that it is not to the advantage of the junta:

*"We are not going to have fun creating a situation that interferes with efforts to restore certain standards of governance for the benefit of a case that puts all other achievements on the back burner. So, regarding the disappearance of these two activists, the state authorities, through the Attorney General, have been very clear."*<sup>9</sup>

Bah said the responsibility of finding the two leaders now lies with the police. If the junta is involved in the arrest of the two, it could impact its relationship with **Western** donors, namely France and the **United States (US)**. Guinea has especially relied on donor funding for the transition, which has been delayed (see below). While the authorities have denied their involvement, there is a lack of trust given the previous detention of the two and other political leaders. Rights groups have also been quick to take aim at the junta, adding impetus to the accusations that the junta is behind their arrest.

### Transition delays re-affirmed but regional pressure subsides

Government spokesperson **Ousmane Gaoual Diallo** confirmed on 24 July that only the constitutional referendum will be organised by the end of 2024, once again affirming that Guinea's return to constitutional rule has been delayed. Before Diallo's media address, the **Conseil national de la transition (CNT)** (national transitional council) met for a plenary session on 22 July to discuss the constitution. The CNT noted that it is setting up working groups to review the constitution before it can be published to the public.<sup>10</sup>

Diallo noted that the transition needs to take place in stages and requires aspects such as financial mobilisation, which have been lacking. He also clarified that the government is currently not just undertaking an electoral census, but rather a census to develop a civil register from which the electoral register will be drawn.<sup>11</sup> Diallo did not provide an end date for the transition, which was initially set at 24 months from January 2023.

Civil registration in Guinea has historically been paper-based and taken place in a de-centralised administrative structure, run by municipalities. Those living in rural areas have faced difficulty in accessing civil registration centres. In some cases, vital events, such as births and deaths, are reported in a village notebook but it is unclear if this information is transferred to civil registration centres.<sup>12</sup>

Diallo also said certain elements in the political class and civil society are working to ensure that the transition does not move forward by campaigning for citizens to not register:

*"What is contradictory is to demand on the one hand a return to constitutional order and on the other hand, to take actions that are likely to delay the return to constitutional order."*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> AFP, 17 Jul 2024

<sup>7</sup> Jeune Afrique, 17 Jul 2024

<sup>8</sup> Jeune Afrique, 23 Jul 2024

<sup>9</sup> Africa Guinee, 26 Jul

<sup>10</sup> Africa Guinee, 22 Jul 2024

<sup>11</sup> Vision Guinee, 24 Jul 2024

<sup>12</sup> Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems, accessed 26 Jul 2024

<sup>13</sup> Vision Guinee, 24 Jul 2024

Despite the delays, the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**, during its 65<sup>th</sup> summit on 7 July, welcomed the relative progress made in Guinea's transition, including the plans to hold the constitutional referendum this year.<sup>14</sup> ECOWAS encouraged Guinean authorities to facilitate inclusive political dialogue while instructing its commission to send a technical mission to Guinea to further collaboration. ECOWAS chairman, **Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu** (2023-present), thanked Guinea for its "*unwavering membership*" of ECOWAS, in likely criticism of the decision of other junta-led countries – **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger** – to leave ECOWAS.<sup>15</sup> ECOWAS initially placed greater pressure on Guinea, but since these three countries have announced they are leaving the regional body, and in Mali and Burkina Faso have delayed their transitions, ECOWAS has taken a softer approach to Guinea.

### Regulatory approval given for Simandou

**Australia-headquartered Rio Tinto** announced on 16 July that its **Simandou** iron ore project had received all the required regulatory approvals, including from the Guinean and **Chinese** governments. Rio Tinto holds the rights to blocks 3 and 4 through **Rio Tinto Simfer** – a joint-venture comprising **Simfer S.A**, which develops the mine and in which the Guinean government owns a 15% stake and **Simfer Jersey Ltd** 85%.<sup>16</sup> In turn, Simfer Jersey Ltd is owned 47% by China-headquartered **Chalco Iron Ore Holdings (CIOH)** and 53% by Rio Tinto.<sup>17</sup> CIOH is 20% owned by **China Baowu Steel Group (Baowu)** while **Aluminium Corporation of China (Chinalco)** owns 75%. **China Railway Construction Corporation (2.5%)** and **China Harbour Engineering Company (2.5%)** hold the remaining equity.

The involvement of these Chinese state-owned entities means the project needed the Chinese government's and regulatory approval, alongside the same from Guinea. With these approvals now received, Rio Tinto Simfer can invest and fund its shares of the co-developed rail and port infrastructure needed for the project.<sup>18</sup> The rail and port infrastructure is being built by **Singapore-backed Winning Consortium Simandou (WCS)**, Baowu and the Guinean government. Over 600km of multi-use railway and port facilities will be built. Once completed, all co-developed infrastructure will be transferred to and operated by **Compagnie du Transguinéen JV (CDT)**. Simfer and WCS each hold 42.5% in CDT and the state 15%.

The project is touted as key for the iron ore industry, not just because of its potential (Simandou is estimated to hold over two billion tonnes of iron ore reserves) but because it allows China to diversify its suppliers.<sup>19</sup> Rio Tinto affirmed in its announcement that once complete, this will be the largest greenfield integrated mine and infrastructure investment in **Africa**. Rio Tinto Simfer's capital funding requirement for the project is \$11.6 billion, of which Rio Tinto is financing approximately \$6.2 billion. This latest approval means that construction of the long-delayed mine – rights were first granted to Rio Tinto in 1997 – can now resume ahead of commercial production, expected in 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Vision Guinee, 8 Jul 2024

<sup>15</sup> Vision Guinee, 8 Jul 2024

<sup>16</sup> Rio Tinto website, accessed 26 Jul 2024

<sup>17</sup> Rio Tinto website, accessed 26 Jul 2024

<sup>18</sup> Mining Technology, 16 Jul 2024

<sup>19</sup> Global Times, 17 Jul 2024

## Planner

2024 **Guinea** Constitutional referendum expected  
 TBC **Guinea** Presidential elections  
 2025 **Conakry (Guinea)** Start of exploitation at the **Simandou** iron ore project;

## Chronology

22 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Vision Guinea*. Foreign affairs minister **Morissanda Kouyaté** meets with his **Gambian** counterpart, **Mamadou Tangara**, to discuss strengthening bilateral relations;

22 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Vision Guinea*. **Australia's Rio Tinto** appoints **Aboubacar Koulibaly** as managing director of **Rio Tinto Guinea**;

20 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Vision Guinea*. President **Mamady Doumbouya** and infrastructure and public works minister **Mahamadou Diallo** launch construction work on the **Boké-Dabis-Québo** road (**Guinea-Bissau** border), co-financed by the **African Development Bank (AfDB)**, the **European Union** and the Guinean government;

19 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Vision Guinea*. Transitional president General **Mamady Doumbouya** meets with **United Nations (UN)** deputy secretary general **Amina Jane Mohammed** to discuss the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the UN system in Guinea;

17 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *BBC*. Lawmakers embark on a nationwide strike against the ruling junta carrying out arbitrary arrests and secret detentions;

11 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinea*. **United Nations (UN)** special rapporteur on human rights **Mary Lawlor** says she is very concerned by the detention of civil society coalition **Front national pour la défense de la constitution (FNDC)** members **Oumar Sylla** and **Mamadou Billo Bah**;

10 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *APA News*. Civil society coalition **Front national pour la défense de la constitution (FNDC)** says heavily armed soldiers arrested its members, **Oumar Sylla** and **Mamadou Billo Bah**, on 9 July, calling it a kidnapping;

9 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Vision Guinea*. Energy minister **Aboubacar Camara** says that ministries have not paid their electricity bills since the start of 2024;

7 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinea*. **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** says it recognises the likely postponement of Guinea's return to constitutional rule, initially planned for December 2024, but welcomes the progress made;

5 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinea*. Government spokesperson **Ousmane Gaoual Diallo** says the government is addressing Guinea's energy crisis but notes that these issues are historical and will take several years to completely resolve;

3 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Vision Guinea*. Prime minister **Bah Oury** says authorities' main objective is to organise the constitutional referendum by the end of the year, which is necessary to organise elections;

3 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinea*. **Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)** announces it will lift its sanctions on Guinea that have been in place since the coup in September 2021;

2 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinea*. **China** invites Colonel **Mamady Doumbouya** to attend the **Sino-Africa Summit**;

1 Jul 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Agence Ecofin*. Guinea and **Mali** sign a fibre optic interconnection agreement;

29 Jun 2024 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Africa Guinea*. Economy minister **Mourana Soumah** says Guinea's economic growth is forecast to reach 4.4% in 2024, a drop from 5.9%, but says it is still a good outcome.

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