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# GUINEA

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## Republic of Guinea

**Population:** 9.4 million (4.7 million under 18)

**Government armed forces:** 12,300

**Compulsory recruitment age:** 18

**Voluntary recruitment age:** 18

**Voting age:** 18

**Optional Protocol:** not signed

**Other treaties ratified (see glossary):**

CRC, GC AP I and II, ICC, ILO 138, ILO 182, ACRWC

***There were no reports of under-18s in government armed forces. Guinean nationals, including children, who had taken part in the Liberian conflict were demobilized from Liberian armed groups, but only very few took part in demobilization programs. There were reports of re-recruitment of former combatants.***

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## Context

Drastically deteriorating living standards for the majority of the population after over 20 years of authoritarian rule under President Lansana Conté led to two general strikes in February and June 2006. A third general strike in January 2007 became an unprecedented popular revolt calling for political change. Demonstrations in the following weeks, in which school students and other young people played an active part, were violently suppressed by the security forces. Estimates of those killed ranged from 130 to over 180 with over 1,500 injured. Some of them were children.<sup>1</sup>

Guinea was an immediate neighbour of Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia. When conflicts broke out in those countries thousands of refugees, as well as large numbers of returning Guinean nationals, crossed the border into Guinea. Most of them found refuge in the isolated Forest Region of Guinea (Guinée forestière), where the borders of all four countries met.<sup>2</sup> By 1997–8 there were close to half a million refugees and asylum-seekers in Guinea registered with the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), reducing to about 100,000 in 2004–5 as neighbouring countries became more stable and refugees returned home.<sup>3</sup> By 2007 around 12,000 refugees – about 70 per cent from Liberia and about 30 per cent from Sierra Leone – remained in Guinea.<sup>4</sup> They included about 350 Sierra Leonean children separated from their families.<sup>5</sup>

Guinea was involved in the complex web of conflicts in neighbouring countries – in Sierra Leone from 1991–2002, in the Liberian conflicts

of 1990–7 and 2000–3, and in Côte d'Ivoire since 2002.<sup>6</sup> The Guinean security forces were reportedly involved in providing or facilitating the provision of arms flows to combatants in those countries.<sup>7</sup> At times attacks were mounted from those countries into Guinea.

In the 1990s Guinea was intimately involved in the conflict in Sierra Leone, from where the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched cross-border attacks on Guinea in 2000–1. Guinea used recruits from Sierra Leonean refugee camps in Guinea to fight off those attacks, and played an active role in defeating the RUF in the final stages of the Sierra Leone conflict.<sup>8</sup>

Around the same time as the attacks by the RUF, Guinea was attacked also from Liberia. The armed group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) was based in Guinea, and in contravention of the UN arms embargo on Liberia the Guinean Ministry of Defence reportedly provided arms to LURD around the time of its attacks on Monrovia in July 2003 which ultimately overthrew President Charles Taylor.<sup>9</sup>

Guinea was also involved in the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. The Guinean government reportedly was transshipping arms for the government of Côte d'Ivoire, at least until the imposition of a UN arms embargo in November 2004.<sup>10</sup> In June 2004 the Forces armées des Forces nouvelles (FAFN) in Côte d'Ivoire claimed that an attack on them by unidentified armed elements which killed 11 civilians in Korhogo, in the north of the country, was supported by the Guinean government.<sup>11</sup> In December 2006 a UN expert group reported that it had credible information that Guinea had been used as a transit point for the training of fighters loyal to Côte d'Ivoire President Gbagbo.<sup>12</sup>

The Forest Region of Guinea was the crossroads for arms trafficking and a migrant population of thousands of young fighters, including child soldiers, crossing the borders between Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire who saw conflict mainly as an economic opportunity. Many had first been forcibly recruited as children in one conflict, then willingly crossed borders to take up arms in another, often with a different armed group. A 2005 study by Human Rights Watch found that most had been motivated by promises of financial gain, and many could not articulate the political objective of the group they fought with. The risk of re-recruitment was exacerbated by high rates of youth unemployment and corruption and deficiencies in the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs.<sup>13</sup> An August 2006 report by the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) noted that high levels of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, across west Africa posed a risk to stability in the region. This was reiterated in a 2007 report by the UN Secretary-General which highlighted also the importance of reform of the

security sector in countries in the region as a means of addressing it.<sup>14</sup>

## **Government**

### **National recruitment legislation and practice**

Under Order No. 072/PRG/SGG/90 of 25 July 1990, all Guinean citizens aged 18–25 could be called for military service for 18 months (Article 1).<sup>15</sup> While conscription was provided for in law, there was no military service in practice.<sup>16</sup>

Guinean law and army regulations prohibited the recruitment of under-18s into the armed forces.<sup>17</sup> However, there were insufficient measures with regard to birth registration, especially in rural areas.<sup>18</sup> This meant that it was not always possible to be sure whether a young person was 18.

### **Child recruitment and deployment**

At the time of the cross-border attacks into Guinea from Liberia and Sierra Leone in 2000–1, more than 7,000 young men volunteered for the Young Volunteers (*Jeunes volontaires*), civilian militias supporting the Guinean army.<sup>19</sup> The government had undertaken that they would be employed in the regular army afterwards but in fact very few of them were.<sup>20</sup>

The extent of child recruitment into the Young Volunteers was not established and was consistently denied by government authorities. There had been training for officers with regard to children's rights, including preventing the recruitment and use of children.<sup>21</sup> One former Young Volunteer claimed to have been as young as 13 when he was recruited.<sup>22</sup>

Only a small minority of Young Volunteers had completed a demobilization process, and the status of those who had not demobilized was unclear. Some retained their arms and reportedly continued to act as volunteer soldiers; others were reportedly employed providing security services for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies operating in the Forest Region.<sup>23</sup> There were also reports that some of them set up roadblocks, looting vehicles and robbing passengers.<sup>24</sup> In March 2006 the UN reportedly estimated that some 4,000 volunteer soldiers, all or almost all by then over 18, operated in the Forest Region, providing their own uniforms and hoping to be formally recruited to the armed forces.<sup>25</sup>

### **Armed groups**

Many of the combatants in the conflicts in neighbouring countries were from Guinea. More than half of the over 600 disarmed combatants in Liberia who were identified as foreign nationals were from Guinea.<sup>26</sup> The same applied also to

foreign national children formerly associated with the fighting forces who were repatriated from Liberia by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).<sup>27</sup>

In mid-2005 it was reported that many former LURD combatants, who had operated from Guinea during the Liberian conflict, were moving back from Liberia to the Forest Region of Guinea.<sup>28</sup>

From mid-2004 there were reports of active recruitment of former combatants in Liberia for both pro and anti-government groups in Guinea. Recruitment was reported to be taking place in Monrovia and counties bordering Guinea, among former combatants associated with former President Charles Taylor, as well as former LURD combatants.<sup>29</sup> According to some reports, Guinean military officials associated with the son of a former president of Guinea, Sékou Touré, offered money to former LURD combatants to join an attack on Guinea. There were also allegations that Liberians may have been involved in an assassination attempt against President Conté in January 2005. Other former LURD combatants were recruiting on behalf of the Guinean government. Some of those being recruited were reported to be children.<sup>30</sup> However, despite the well-documented recruitment, and reports of infiltration into Guinea in late 2004, attacks by the armed groups allegedly plotting to overthrow President Conté did not materialize.<sup>31</sup> In October 2006 the Secretary-General reported that the UN had obtained no confirmation of the allegations of recruitment of child soldiers by Liberian armed groups in connection with the situation in Guinea.<sup>32</sup>

During the crisis in early 2007 there were some reports of fighters crossing into Guinea from neighbouring countries in anticipation of recruitment into armed groups or militias. However, there was no evidence of such groups being formed, or of children being targeted for recruitment. Former armed group commanders were reported to have said there was now no need to recruit children given the numbers of experienced combatants – many of them former child soldiers – to recruit from.<sup>33</sup>

### **Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)**

By 2004 about 350 Young Volunteers had completed training as part of a demobilization program, but thousands of others, many recruited as children, had not benefited from the program because of lack of funds.<sup>34</sup> In 2007 it was reported that some rehabilitation projects aimed at former Young Volunteers continued.<sup>35</sup>

In November 2003 UNICEF estimated that some 2,000 Guinean child soldiers, including child soldiers returning from Liberia, required demobilization, disarmament and reintegration.<sup>36</sup>

In the event, the number of Guinean child soldiers who took part in DDR programs was substantially lower than this estimate. As of June 2006, 29 Guinean child soldiers had been demobilized in Liberia and returned to Guinea.<sup>37</sup>

Many children reportedly self-demobilized through fear of being stigmatized. NGOs working with children in Guinea reported that a barrier to both successful reintegration of former child soldiers and prevention of new recruitment was the difficulty of discussing the issue openly because of the stigma attached to child soldiering. This meant that many former child soldiers were unwilling to reveal that they had been combatants.<sup>38</sup>

Former child soldiers were also reported to be having difficulty in adapting to civilian life, in particular the loss of the power and relative wealth gained through association with an armed group.<sup>39</sup> In 2007 large numbers of former child soldiers were believed to be present, without support, in the Forest Region.<sup>40</sup>

- 1 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Guinea: Change or Chaos*, Africa Report No. 121, 14 February 2007, and *Guinea: Change on Hold*, Africa Briefing No. 49, 8 November 2007; Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Dying for Change: Brutality and Repression by Guinean Security Forces in Response to a Nationwide Strike*, April 2007; Amnesty International (AI), *Guinea: "Soldiers were Shooting Everywhere" – The Security Forces' Response to Peaceful Demands for Change* (AFR 29/003/2007), 27 June 2007.
- 2 "Guinea's Forest Region – living on the edge", IRIN, January 2005, www.irinnews.org.
- 3 UNHCR, Country Data Sheet: Guinea, 2005 *UNHCR Statistical Yearbook*, 30 April 2007, www.unhcr.org.
- 4 UNHCR, Global Appeal 2008–2009.
- 5 Report of the UN Secretary-General on cross-border issues in West Africa, UN Doc. S/2007/143, 13 March 2007.
- 6 See entries on Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone in this volume.
- 7 ICG, *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, Africa Report No. 94, 14 June 2005.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Second report of the Secretary-General on the UN operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2004/697, 27 August 2004.
- 12 Report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia, UN Doc. S/2006/976, 15 December 2006.
- 13 See HRW, *Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa's Regional Warriors*, March 2005; Report of the Secretary-General on ways to combat subregional and cross-border problems in West Africa, UN Doc. S/2004/200, 12 March 2004; Report of the Secretary-General on inter-mission co-operation and possible cross-border operations between the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, the UN Mission in Liberia, and the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2005/135, 2 March 2005.
- 14 UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA), *Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa*, 2nd edn, August 2006, www.un.org/unowa; Report of the Secretary-General, above note 5.
- 15 Initial report of Guinea to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UN Doc. CRC/C/3/Add.48, 17 June 1997. (This corrects the error in *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2001 and 2004*.)
- 16 *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, citing confidential source, Guinea, May 2004.
- 17 Ibid., citing confidential source.
- 18 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of initial report submitted by Guinea, Concluding observations, UN Doc. CRC/C/15/Add.100, 10 May 1999.
- 19 *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, above note 7; *Guinea: Change or Chaos*, above note 1.
- 20 Child Soldiers Coalition, *Child Soldiers and Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration in West Africa*, November 2006.
- 21 Coalition interviews in Guinea, 2005; information from confidential source, 2007; see also *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*.
- 22 "Guinea: in a desperate bid for jobs, youths sign up as 'volunteers'", IRIN, 6 March 2006.
- 23 Ibid.; Coalition interviews in Guinea, 2005; Confidential sources, Guinea, August 2007.
- 24 Coalition interviews with army officers and NGOs in Guinea, June 2007.
- 25 IRIN, above note 22.
- 26 Fifth progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Mission in Liberia, UN Doc. S/2004/972, 17 December 2004.
- 27 Seventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Mission in Liberia, UN Doc. S/2005/391, 16 June 2005.
- 28 *Stopping Guinea's Slide*, above note 7.
- 29 Ibid.; *Youth, Poverty and Blood*, above note 13.
- 30 Report of the UN Panel of Experts on Liberia, UN Doc. S/2005/30, 13 June 2005.
- 31 *Guinea: Change or Chaos*, above note 1.
- 32 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, UN Doc. A/61/529-S/2006-826, 26 October 2006.
- 33 Confidential source, May 2007.
- 34 For a more detailed account see *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*.
- 35 Coalition interviews in Guinea, June 2007.
- 36 UNICEF, "A window on West Africa's war-weary children", 4 November 2003.

37 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 32.

38 Coalition interviews in Guinea, 2005.

39 Ibid.

40 Confidential source, May 2007.