CONFLICT ASSESSMENT TO GUINEA

September 2008
**swisspeace** is an independent peace research institute in Switzerland that researches the causes of war and violent conflict, develops tools for early recognition of tensions, and formulates conflict mitigation and peacebuilding strategies. It has significant experience in political early warning. Besides developing its own early warning system FAST, swisspeace has been instrumental in creating CEWARN, the early warning mechanism of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for the Horn of Africa, and the early warning system of the Foundation for Co-Existence that operates in the eastern part of Sri Lanka. In addition to its expertise in early warning, swisspeace is also well known for its state-of-the-art application of research done in the field of conflict sensitivity (do no harm), dealing with the past, and mediation support.

**Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP)** began in 1999 as an informal network of applied conflict prevention and resolution organizations in the United States. As a meeting place for collaboration and the development and dissemination of innovative approaches to peacebuilding, AfP enables its members to be more effective peacebuilders. AfP is a voice for the peacebuilding community through its programs, services and leadership. AfP is now a membership association for more than 50 organizations within the peacebuilding field around the world.

This report is a shortened and edited version of the assessment report on Guinea written by Dane F. Smith. The other persons who contributed to this assessment and whose ideas are an integral part of this report are Gen. Lamine Cissé, Elizabeth Côté, Dr. Siba Grovogui, and Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff.
FOREWORD

The bitter consequences when a conflict escalates into violence – or even war – are lost lives, missed opportunities for development, and displaced and separated families. In the recent years, a lot has been done to prevent violent conflict. Researchers have developed tools that help prevent the devastating events leading to violent conflict. Similarly, several early warning databases have been created to predict the likelihood of an armed conflict. However, these two strands often operate independently from each other. Unfortunately, effective responses to early warning information are still lacking.

The problem is not that conflict prevention is simply an idea that has yet to be adopted by major international actors. Nor is the problem that prevention has never been tried or has always failed. Nevertheless, to date no organization has stepped forward to assume the responsibility of acting as an international catalyst to galvanize various efforts to formulate an early response strategy. Similarly, no organization gathers and provides review of all the numerous early warning alerts. As a result, much of the early warning information goes unheeded. Thus, an operating system that responds in a timely manner to early warnings is still missing, leaving a strategic gap in conflict prevention efforts.

The BEFORE project grew out of such considerations. BEFORE tries to remedy the gap between early warning information and early response and thereby helps to prevent the devastation of violent conflict in fragile states. In response to the needs and challenges of potential conflict countries, it moves quickly and flexibly. It constantly analyzes and reviews its projects, then later shares and disseminates its experiences and lessons with policy makers, government officials, regional and international bodies, analysts and practitioners.

BEFORE is directed by a Governing Board of renowned experts in conflict prevention. The Governing Board appoints regional steering committees, which in response to political early warning signs decide whether or not any countries in their region require further action. The steering committee sends an assessment mission to the country of concern to further determine whether or not BEFORE could positively contribute to the situation in that country. If the assessment team makes a recommendation, which is approved by the steering committee, then a team will be engaged to implement the development of conflict prevention strategies.

This approach has been employed in Guinea-Bissau since 2004 by the International Peace and Prosperity Project (IPPP). The sole focus of the first BEFORE project in Guinea-Bissau is to prevent political violence. Despite the March 2009 assassinations of the President and Army Chief of Staff, the program results have been generally encouraging. An independent evaluation conducted in 2008 found that people perceived the country to be more politically open.

Encouraged by the activities and lessons learned in Guinea-Bissau, the BEFORE West Africa Regional Steering Committee selected Guinea as the next country for BEFORE activities. An assessment team was then sent to conduct a preliminary conflict analysis. This report is a shortened version of the assessment team’s report on the root causes of conflict and recommended actions for BEFORE in Guinea. BEFORE would like to thank all members of the assessment team for their superior work and Michael Lund for the excellent guidelines and briefing on BEFORE methodology.
Executive Summary

The BEFORE regional Steering Committee for West Africa decided in May 2008 that Guinea could profit from an operational peacebuilding project carried out according to the BEFORE methodology. It decided to send a preliminary assessment mission to the country to further analyze the potential for violent conflict in the country.

A team made up of international and regional peacebuilding experts traveled to Guinea-Conakry in mid-September. The team followed the guidelines put together by Michael Lund, a BEFORE Governing Board member and one of the initiators of the BEFORE project. The goals of the mission were to find out whether Guinea was threatened by a significant violent conflict and what mobilizing factors, if any, were present that could translate into violent or armed activity. According to the BEFORE methodology, in order to make a comprehensive conflict assessment, societal factors that curtail violence must be given the same importance as conflict fault lines. The third task of the team was to ascertain whether an externally-stimulated initiative, such as BEFORE, could contribute to peace in the country.

Unlike its neighboring countries, Guinea has successfully avoided civil war and large-scale devastation on its territory. However, a longstanding political stalemate is creating immense challenges for the country. The BEFORE assessment team visited the country two months before the military coup, which took place just a few hours after the death of the long-time President Lansana Conté. Since there have been a number of significant changes after the BEFORE assessment mission, a renewed analysis of the current mobilizing factors of violence will be needed in the future. However, the team undertook a thorough analysis of the root causes of the conflict, which are unlikely to change over time, defined those already existing factors supportive of Guinea’s peaceful transition and suggested a set of measures the BEFORE project could undertake in order to facilitate Guinea’s peaceful transition.

The root causes of conflict in Guinea fall into five categories: the absence of rule of law, ethnic grievances, the state of the security and defense forces, economic hardship and inequality, and external tension. The assessment team also found several institutions and organizations that could work as positive forces for peace. Eventually, the team concluded that although Guinea is hardly lacking in conflict and peacebuilding initiatives, there is space for a flexible and catalytic conflict prevention initiative, such as BEFORE. The team emphasized that any BEFORE initiative should build on already existing capacities and collaborate with those actors already conducting peacebuilding work in the country. That is a prerequisite for all BEFORE country missions.
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Introduction

In May 2008 the BEFORE Steering Committee for West Africa 1 met in Bern, Switzerland to discuss the next possible engagement site for BEFORE. After a deliberate analysis of the situation in the entire region of West Africa, and in response to the political early warning signs that several international and regional organizations produced, the Steering Committee selected Guinea as an appropriate case for further analysis. The committee justified its selection of Guinea-Conakry because it had been at a transition point for a long time. Tensions between the country’s ethnic groups could possibly escalate into violent conflict and recent incidents involving the military and police point to a lack of trust between the security forces and the civilian population. In accordance with the BEFORE methodology, an assessment mission was sent to conduct a preliminary conflict assessment to analyze a) the likelihood of violent conflict and b) whether the BEFORE project would be in a position to help prevent any erupting violence in the country.

Dr. Michael Lund, Senior Specialist in Conflict and Peacebuilding and a member of the BEFORE Governing Board, put together a set of questions for the assessment team. The primary goal was to determine whether or not Guinea would be faced in the near future with the prospect of significant violent conflict or political stalemate and stagnation that could lead to eventual conflict and state failure. In addition, the assessment mission had the task of digging deeper into the conflict dynamics of the country and to find out which leading factors might increase the possibility of significant violent conflict or political breakdown. Since every conflict is unique, the assessment team was asked to look for possible conflict fault lines -- socio-economic, historical, cultural, regional or ethnic -- and to analyze the degree of danger posed. Equally important was to identify mobilizing factors that could translate problems into violent or armed activity, and political and institutional deficiencies that could block peaceful solutions.

BEFORE also looks for the positive forces that curtail violence. Therefore, the second goal of the conflict assessment was to look for the factors inhibiting or preventing descent into conflict and how they can be mobilized to keep the peace.

The third task of the mission was to ascertain whether an external initiative by BEFORE project, a project stimulated from the outside, would be locally welcomed and able to operate productively in the country through like-minded partners.

The Steering Committee for West Africa nominated one of its members, former U.S. Ambassador to Guinea, Dane F. Smith to lead the assessment team. The BEFORE methodology prescribes that all the BEFORE entities and organs should have a good North-South balance; this also applies to the assessment team. The team obtained the services of four key experts: General Lamine Cissé of Senegal, who had recently completed a stint as Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General for West Africa; Elizabeth Côté, Director of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)-Guinea; Dr. Siba Grovogui, Professor of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University, and the Honorable Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, a Commissioner for Human Rights in the government of Sierra Leone. The West African Network for Peacebuilding in Guinea (WANEP) took care of local arrangements.

The initial assessment mission lasted two weeks, after which the team compiled a comprehensive report on its findings. The team met with a wide range of stakeholders at different levels, including current and former government members, political leaders, civil society and the international community. The team mostly conducted interviews in Conakry but two members also traveled to Upper Guinea and the Forest Region to get a clearer picture of the regional differences.

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1 The members of the West Africa Steering Committee are: Lydia Umar (Nigeria), Macaria Barai (Guinea-Bissau), Vere Hayes (UK), Andreas Mehler (Germany), Kwesi Aning (Ghana), Dane F. Smith (US).
The end of September 2008 was not a particularly easy time for traveling to Guinea. The population expected elections, which had been postponed on several occasions, to be organized as soon as possible. Two months after the completion of the mission, long-time president Lansana Conté died, triggering a crisis. After his death, a military junta, led by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara took power in a bloodless military coup and established the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD). This action was widely criticized by the international community. Guinea has been suspended from the African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Organisation International de la Francophone (OIF). However, the Guinean public, anxious for change, appeared initially to accept the new regime. A major point of contention between the different stakeholders in the country is about the upcoming elections. This report does not go into detail about the current challenges rising from the change in incumbency, but assesses the root causes of the conflict and the positive forces that may help the country to avoid political violence.

The Guinean Context

Located in the unstable region of the Mano River Union, this small West African country with an approximate population of 10 million people has successfully avoided the fratricide of its neighbors. Guinea has also avoided civil war, however, smaller incidents of violence have taken place in parts of the country. Guinea was the first francophone African country to free itself from French colonialism. Union leader and secretary-general of the Democratic Party of Guinea Ahmed Sekou Touré, became the first president of Guinea in 1958. Under the leadership of its ethnic Malinke president, Guinea became a highly autocratic state. Tens of thousands of people suffered death and long prison terms under his repression, to which the Camp Boiro prison became an infamous memorial. Nevertheless, for some Guineans President Touré remains a hero.

When Touré died during his 26th year of presidency in 1984, Colonel Lansana Conté took power in a bloodless coup, shifting the power at the top from the Malinke to the Susu ethnic group. Conté became president and Minister of Defence. The regime’s promises and constitutional changes led to liberalization and to the first multi-party elections in 1993. Lansana Conté won the elections and all the subsequent ones, bringing along autocratic characteristics to the regime. For over two decades President Conté’s party, le Parti de l’Unite et du Progres (PUP), one of the few to show modest ethnic balance, controlled most of the posts at the government level and all substantial patronage networks throughout the military and civil bureaucracy. The Guinean political opposition had to contend itself with very little power in the unicameral people’s National Assembly. The last elections were carried out in 2002; PUP received 61.6 percent of the votes whereas the second biggest party Union pour le Progres et le Renouveau (UPR) only received 26.6 percent. The legislative elections were due to take place in 2007 but were postponed several times. The elections were initially postponed to allow time for the rebuilding of local administrations in the country’s regions after hostile demonstrations in January and February 2007.

After years of hardship, in February and June 2006 the country’s trade unions launched two general strikes demanding the end of mismanagement by Conté’s government. This was followed by an unprecedented period of political turmoil in January-February 2007. The trade unions launched a third general and open-ended strike, which turned into country-wide mass protest, in which several protestors and policemen were killed. The historic nation-wide strikes and mass movements forced President Conté to agree to selection of reform prime minister Lansana Kouyate. This seemingly promising attempt to change the country’s course was ultimately defeated by the machinations of the presidential palace and Kouyate’s loss of legitimacy.

The death of the President Lansana Conté on 23 December 2008, two months after the BEFORE assessment mission had visited the country, drastically changed Guinea’s situation. Power was taken by Army Commander Moussa Dadis Camara who established Conseil National de la Democratie et du
Before Conflict Assessment to Guinea

The ruling CNDD coalition is said to be a coalition between reformers and old-style military politicians. During his first days in power, the CNDD President Camara made a series of promises. He promised to start preparations for elections, name a new civilian prime minister and have a majority of civilian ministers. He also expressed his intentions of fighting corruption, initiating audits and punishing those who continue to stand in the way of Guinea’s development. At the time of writing, a definitive date for elections has not been set. A number of African and Western governments criticized the military government and have called for elections by the end of the year. Thus far, Guineans, including the major civil society groups, have opted not to confront the military-led government over the timing of elections.

Potential Sources of Violence

One of the characteristics of the BEFORE approach is a continuous assessment of the situation in the conflict country as well as reevaluating its own activities. The recent developments in Guinea warrant revising the 2008 assessment. However, certain factors, so-called root causes of a conflict, are unlikely to change in the short-term. Root causes are being used to assess the basic risk potential of a country.

In its preliminary assessment of the root causes of the conflict, the BEFORE assessment team found five potential sources of violence: the absence of law, ethnic grievances, the state of the security and defense forces, economic hardship and inequality as well as external tensions. The team was able to gain access to many influential persons in the country through the team members’ different backgrounds and considerable country expertise. This analysis is based on the numerous interviews the team conducted throughout all sectors of the Guinean society.

Absence of Rule of Law

For the better part of its early post-colonial era, the single party state led by Sekou Touré pointed to an arsenal of formal laws, including the Constitution, as evidence of its own legitimacy and the justness of its imposed order. Although Guinea had constitutional and legal prohibitions against arbitrary rulings and torture, thousands of people were sentenced in secret trials and imprisoned in the infamous Camp Boiro. Under Sekou Touré, the judiciary was not independent and the party had ultimate the say over the legitimacy of government decisions or actions.

Against this background, today’s opposition leaders and former critics of President Conté (including the Rally for the Guinean People and the Union of Republican Forces) are not impressed by the statement that a rule-of-law environment was implemented following the 1984 military coup by Sekou Toure. Instead, the critics of both Toure’s and Conté’s regimes point to growing authoritarianism, the corruption of public life, and loss of public faith in the institutions of freedom, property, contract, and justice as the foundation and purpose of good government. Opposition parties, judges, lawyers, and others reflexively cite the erosion of the constitutional and legal systems, democratic values and human rights. There is no overall consensus within the different sectors of the Guinean society and state, including the state security officials, the opposition leaders, the order of advocates and educated Guineans on what the rule-of-law means and whether it exists in Guinea. For the latter groups, formal legal systems alone do not ensure economic justice and good governance.

On several occasions, the assessment team encountered opposition leaders and others hinting at the emergence of mafia-like clans within the inner circles of state. This reflects the state’s inability to exercise its legislative and regulatory authority to protect civil liberties and public freedom. It seemed to be fairly clear to many of the interviewees that the former President Conté bore the responsibility for
the breakdown of the rule-of-law. While dispensing with formal legal procedures, he encouraged mob justice and embezzlement by government officials.

**Ethnic Grievances**

Most Guineans and outside observers characterize Guinean society as sharply divided ethnically among Fula (Peulh), Malinké, Susu (Soussou), and the more fragmented smaller ethnic groups in the Forest Region. The Susu are associated with the coastal lowlands; the Fulas with the Fouta Jallon elevated midlands; the Malinké with Upper Guinea, and the numerous animist and Christian ethnic groups associated with Forest Guinea. The Forest Region also contains a large admixture of people linked by language and culture with the Malinké and often referred to as Konianké. Another small Malinké-linked group, the Jalonké, is associated with the Fouta Jallon and now speaks Pular, the language of the Fula. All groups are well represented in Conakry, particularly Susu and Fula.

Malinké President Sékou Touré’s inflammatory charge of a Peulh conspiracy in the mid 1960s led to the savage repression of large numbers of the Fula elite and lingering bitterness. Susus held a majority position in Conté’s government and played a dominant role in the security and defense establishment. The Susu fear a possible return of the Malinké to power. The Malinké were targets of Lansana Conté’s wrath following an attempted coup in 1985, and the Forest communities were incited against them the same year, when hundreds died following Conté’s remarks that the Malinké were occupying too much space in the Forest Region. Susus and Fulas have had several clashes in Conakry.

Paradoxically, these divisions are expressed against the background of a post-colonial discourse and nationalism in which national unity was the ultimate goal. Ethnic grievances should be placed in the context of events that generated them. Each context illuminates the orientation of a grievance and therefore the possible means of diffusing it. For instance, the grievance of the Fula as a group stems from suspicion of the state, particularly the police state – and not of any particular group. When Touré arrested and tortured Fula elites, the party claimed to have targeted individuals who undermined national sovereignty (through foreign-backed plots) and national unity by promoting ethnic preference at all levels of the bureaucracy and national life. This is why, aside from the belief in some Fula circles that they are owed the presidency, the majority of the Fula and the parties that represent them have focused on reforming the law and state. By contrast, Malinké were only indirectly victimized by the state under Conté. Conte gave justification and legitimacy to mob violence by elements of one ethnic group against another, both at the time of anti-Malinké riots after the 1985 coup attempt by the Prime Minister Diarra Traore and anti-Malinké slaughters in the Forest Region after 1991. Again, it is important to note that the response from victimized groups and others pointed to a desire to return to a time when Guinea was united as a nation following national independence.

Political parties in Guinea are largely ethnic in their orientation but the division of the Fula into several fiercely competitive political parties limits their chances of forging an electoral majority. Clashes leading to ethnic cleansing in certain areas cannot be ruled out where serious instability is present. Some of BEFORE’s interlocutors in Guinea believed that the most serious potential political conflict in the post-Conté era would be between Malinké and Susu. Nevertheless, the assessment team believes that although there is currently a heightened sense of ethnic consciousness in politics, a scenario of wide-spread ethnic warfare is unlikely.

**The State of the Security and Defense Forces**

Over the course of time, the Guinean security and defense forces became the best organized entity in the country. The Guinean army and the *gendarmérie* (which originally emerged from French colonial troops) have proved themselves on several battlefields and supported the independence struggles of fellow African countries, such as Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. Later, the Guinean forces
participated in other international operations on behalf of the United Nations or other sub-regional organizations, including the ECOWAS monitoring force ECOMOG in Liberia (beginning in 1990), Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and the successful expulsion of Liberian and Sierra Leonean rebel forces after their invasion of Guinea in 2000.

In 1996 a lack of discipline overtook the troops, causing the most violent riots in the history of the 2nd Republic. This breach was a consequence of the breakdown of civil-military relations. Leading up to the crisis, the command authority and the subordinate divisions for executing orders failed to fulfill their respective roles. Thus, February 1996 became an infamous date in the recent history of the armed forces. The violence resulted in an increase in soldiers’ salaries and a payment plan for backlogged benefits. Nonetheless, it was only following the events of 2007 that these agreements began to be implemented.

The handling of the 2006 and 2007 strikes and protests on the part of the military seriously degraded the relationship between the civilian population and the security and defense forces. In Conakry the police shot into a crowd of unarmed demonstrators and broke up the protests, taking the life of over 100 people. There was a partial reconciliation when the military officially apologized to the population, but internal and external problems continue to plague the security sector in Guinea. The rules for maintenance of order are disregarded, especially the expected order of intervention of the armed forces, i.e. the first level of intervention, the police force, should be followed by the gendarmerie, as needed, and ultimately backstopped by the army, should the situation require their involvement. The external problems include the increasing drug trafficking and the presence of former rebels at Guinean borders.

The armed forces, which are intimately linked to the political sphere, can easily become a source of conflict, particularly if internal dissent and divisions in the ranks take on political dimensions. Therefore the strategy adopted to assist the security and defense forces in effectively protecting and contributing to the development of the nation is a major issue for conflict prevention.

**Economic Hardship and Inequality**

According to the US Geological Survey 2009, Guinea has the world’s largest reserves of bauxite ore. The bauxite sector is dominated by Cie des Bauxites de Guinée (CBG), a joint venture between the Guinean Government and a consortium led by Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA, Inc.), which is the largest exporter of bauxite ore in the world. CBG and other foreign bauxite operations may have an interest in lowering potential tensions in the country. Although bauxite accounts for most of Guinea’s foreign exchange earnings, it has little impact on job or small business creation. Despite the country’s mineral riches, the Guinean population remains poor and strongly affected by high rates of inflation and rising prices for rice, basic foodstuffs, and fuel. The urban poor are facing increasing hardship in making ends meet. The situation is frustrating for many young people emerging from schools and universities, since barely any jobs are available to them.

Most Guineans who are not farmers or herders make their living as part of the extended informal economy. The informal economy is dynamic and includes trade with neighboring countries. Nevertheless, the assessment team found that in Guinea’s prostrate economy the larger part of the population is suffering from economic hardship and inequality. Conditions are said to be particularly bad in some remote prefectures in Upper Guinea and the Fouta Jallon.

**External Tensions**

Guinea’s location in the troubled region of the Mano River Union has affected its international stability in the past and is likely to do so in the future. Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau
have suffered violent civil wars, while Mali and Senegal have faced challenges to central state authority respectively in the Tuareg and Casamance separatist movements. Moreover, a number of ethnic groups straddle international borders and continue to try to move freely between countries. That has led to conflict between inhabitants in the border communities and the various national security forces especially when government agents have taken advantage the borders areas to extort money and otherwise oppress civilians. Long-standing traditional disputes over land have in the past heightened border tensions between Guinea and Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire and Mali.

The flight of millions of people into Guinea from civil war zones in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast has made Guinea's Forest Region particularly contentious over the past 15 years. The refugees have had an adverse impact on the environment through the vast increase in the demands for water, farm land and social infrastructure. Guinea was unable to cope with the influx and the costs of refugee support were only partially met by the international community.

The border issues with Sierra Leone have been particularly tense since the hostility between Guinean soldiers and Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees in the border region has exacerbated long-standing differences of opinion over the location of the international boundary dispute. Although at the official level the two governments have agreed to a formula to resolve formal sovereignty, tension remains high on the ground, punctuated by periodic incidents involving Guinean soldiers and Sierra Leonean civilians. Sierra Leone police and military in Kailahun charge that their Guinean counterparts seem unwilling to participate in confidence building initiatives at the local level.

**Capacities for Peace**

The second, an equally important task of the BEFORE assessment team was to identify the leading capacities for peace that can help to keep sources of potential conflict or breakdown from prevailing. In later stages BEFORE will contribute to strengthening and building on those local capacities.

The fact that Guinea has not fallen into civil war like Liberia and Sierra Leone suggests that there are several factors that help to curtail violence. The team identified a set of attitudes in the Guinean society, a collective mental framework as restraining generalized violence. Certain sentiments are prevalent in the political elite and the population as a whole constitutes a broad public opinion militating against resorting to violence. Guinea's *non* in General de Gaulle's 1958 referendum in favor of inclusion in a French community is a point of pride for all Guineans, even though that gesture led to a Stalinist dictatorship and the impoverishment of a country of great economic potential. Guinea's pioneering option for independence among France’s African colonies rallied virtually all Guineans to the banner of nationalism. That sentiment remains in spite of the disillusionment of the past fifty years. Secondly, Guineans take some pride in the fact that their country has not fallen into a civil war experienced by Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire, in spite of predictions that the conflagration would spread to Guinea. Thirdly, Guineans with their heightened consciousness of ethnic differences, perhaps the most acute in the sub-region, are paradoxically on guard against the danger of generalized ethnic warfare.

Institutionally, the most important factor promoting peace is the growth and proliferation of civil society. The BEFORE assessment team undertook an analysis of those institutions that could play a positive role in curtailing violence. A particularly interesting force within the civil society is the inter-ethnic Committee of Elders, a group of 50 men, which regularly gathers to discuss the developments in the country. The 20-year-old committee had become active again during the mass protests in January-February 2007 and all the four regions of the country were well reflected in the group. The BEFORE team considered the detailed analysis of the group leaders a significant resource for Guinea’s peaceful transition. The Elders are in a national manner reflective of a number of traditional
inter-ethnic mechanisms for conflict resolution in the rural areas, such as mutual forgiveness societies in the Forest Region, and a variety of community-based platforms for dialogue, which has moderated and solved local disputes for decades. Other important civil society groups are the National Council of Guinean Civil Society Organizations (CNOSCG), the Trade Union Alliance, Guinean Organization for Human Rights, the Center for International Trade and Development (CECIDE), and Les Amis Du Futur (Friends of the future).

There have also been other mixed government and civil society organizations set up in the wake of the 2007 demonstrations, which continue to operate – or at least to exist – most prominently, the Civil Military Committee. Other potential resources for a comprehensive peacebuilding strategy are the National Committee on the Fight Against Proliferation and Circulation of Illegal Arms, the Minister of National Reconciliation, and the Independent National Election Committee (CENI), engaged in the electoral preparations.

**Peacebuilding Measures to Support Peaceful Transition**

The third important task given to the assessment team was to identify whether there is space for a violence prevention initiative such as BEFORE. The number of donors and conflict initiatives engaged in the country indicate that Guinea is not lacking conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives. However, when the team posed the question of whether there is space for BEFORE, the answer was always affirmative. The key issue for every BEFORE peacebuilding initiative should therefore be how it can contribute to the peace process and what are the particular niches best suited to its nature.

In September 2008 when the assessment team visited the country, it was clear that the status quo in the country would not continue for ever. The team perceived that prompt support for the legislative elections, in different forms, should be the first short-term peacebuilding initiative undertaken by BEFORE. Hence, building on the existing capacities of peace and trying to address the root causes of violence, the BEFORE assessment team listed a set of measures to start BEFORE engagement in the country. With regard to the challenges the upcoming legislative elections pose to the country, the assessment team determined the following measures, all aimed at supporting the civil society, to be of great importance for future peacebuilding initiatives.

**Support to Legislative Elections**

The initial element of such a strategic approach would be to provide support for a timely and legitimate legislative electoral process. Given the reluctance of the governing elite to proceed (previously President Conté and now the new military-led government), much depends on whether civil society can mount an effective advocacy campaign to bring the elections forward. A longer-term approach would involve support for facilitating the achievement of the transition. Such an approach should focus on strengthening particular civil society groups, which are currently playing a key role in the transition. Another criterion for international support would be the realignment of security forces so that they can provide security and law and order for the nation. Here, BEFORE would need to focus its efforts in filling niches where programs do not exist at present or alternatively on providing complementary resources for programs underway.

**Strengthening Civil Society Groups**

The groups found to have the most potential in this regard are women, youth, the unions and the inter-ethnic Committee of Elders (Comité de Sages).
Women and youth in particular could play an important role in helping to assure a peaceful electoral process. Women have traditionally played an important role in Guinean crises. The importance of women in the independence struggle is well-documented. Nevertheless, women do not have a prominent formal position in Guinea’s political life. The stability of Guinea during the transition now under way would be enhanced if Guinean women were supported in their efforts to build on their conflict resolution interventions during the events of January-February 2007. Based on the experience in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the assessment team expects women to be able to play a role in conflict prevention in Guinea in the short- and long-term.

The second group that would benefit from international support is youth. More than 60 percent of Guinea’s population is under the age of 30. In a deteriorating economy with rampant unemployment, Guinea’s young people have little hope for the future. The strong mobilization of youth during Guinea’s recent events and their willingness to sacrifice themselves demonstrate that they have a vested interest in change. However, as Guinea’s governance crisis becomes more acute, the risk increases that young people will turn to destructive forms of political expression. Channeling the energies of Guinea’s youth toward positive modes of political expression, where shared frustrations can serve as a catalyst for reform rather than conflict, is therefore important to maintaining Guinea’s waning social and political stability. There are nascent networks of youth organizations nationwide that could serve as a platform for awakening youth and developing solidarity for action. Youth groups have a capacity to mobilize their members and resources when inspired, but few are aware of the important role they could play in promoting social, political and economic reform. The Youth could be easily mobilized for a generalized program of non-violence.

Thirdly, the enquiries of the assessment mission show that it is high time to realign the security forces with the nation. Reforms are required in establishing and implementing new standards for recruitment to ensure that the army and police reflect the ethnic composition of the nation, as well as new standards for promotion, length of service and retirement. Rehabilitation of barracks, military encampments and other military infrastructure is important to instill pride in the military and to end the residence of military forces with their weapons in civilian neighborhoods, an invitation to criminal behavior.

**Conclusion**

Guinea does not lack conflict prevention and peace-building initiatives. Over the past two decades donors, international NGOs and regional bodies have sponsored hundreds of training courses, workshops and other initiatives exposing Guineans to outside ideas about constitutionalism, human rights, the rule of law, and the responsibilities of citizenship. The key issues therefore are how BEFORE could contribute to the peaceful transformation of the Guinean society. The assessment team concludes that, if BEFORE chooses to engage in Guinea, it should collaborate with those elements which are already engaged in efforts to promote peace. Potential partners include, above all, civil society but also some of the political parties and certain elements of an otherwise incoherent state apparatus.