



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Guineans campaign against government repression, 2009

28 October

2009

to: 30 October

2009

**Country:** Guinea

**Location City/State/Province:** Conakry

### Goals:

The stated goals of the protestors was “to draw our leaders’ attention to the need to engage in dialogue, preserve national unity, prevent further violence, and arrest the authors of [the 28 September] massacre.”

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 062. Student strike
- 065. Stay-at-home
- 097. Protest strike
- 117. General strike
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 062. Student strike
- 065. Stay-at-home
- 097. Protest strike
- 117. General strike
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

### Methods in 3rd segment:

- 062. Student strike
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

### Methods in 4th segment:

- 062. Student strike
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

### Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 060. Suspension of social and sports activities

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 062. Student strike

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 048. Protest meetings
- 094. International sellers' embargo
- 187. Seizure of assets

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Human Rights

Peace

**Group characterization:**

- Women
- pro-democracy demonstrators
- students
- union members
- workers

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Federation of Youth Associations of Guinea, Opposition Members

**Partners:**

Students, workers, union members, pro-democracy demonstrators, women

**External allies:**

The United States, the European Union, and the Economic Community of West African States placed arms embargoes on Guinea, froze the government's assets, or restricted travel to and from the country.

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Federation of Youth Associations of Guinea (l) Members of the Opposition
- Pro-democracy demonstrators
- Students
- Workers and union members
- women

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

Foreign governments were supporting these goals before this campaign officially began.

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 0.5 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

President Captain Moussa “Dadis” Camara and his military junta government

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

None known

**Campaigner violence:**

None known

**Repressive Violence:**

Students engaging in the hunger strike were arrested, put into shipping crates for at least a day, and then forced to eat at gunpoint.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

1 point out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

Although President Camara has abdicated his position after a failed assassination attempt and promised fair, peaceful elections, there is no reason to believe that this campaign had any direct correlation to this event. However, the students were able to open a direct line of communication to high-level officials in the government and begin to engage in dialogue.

The protests were designated to be only a certain length of time (one day for the general strike and five days for the hunger strike) and maintained large numbers throughout this time (possibly as many as 94,000 out of 97,000 government workers striking).

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Since gaining independence from France in 1958, autocratic rulers have controlled Guinea and made it one of the poorest countries in the world despite the fact that the country is rich in aluminum. The first ruler, Ahmed Sékou Touré, held office for

almost 30 years until his death. Lansansa Conté seized power through a coup d'état after this and maintained his rule until 2008 when he also died. Then, Moussa "Dadis" Camara seized control of the government through another coup d'état on December 23, 2008. Though the government remained fairly stable throughout this time, it only did so through violently repressive means.

This violent repression received international attention on September 28, 2009 when the junta ordered soldiers to end protests that were taking place in a stadium in the capital of Conakry. Although reported numbers vary, it is estimated that at least 50,000 pro-democracy protesters were in the stadium holding a peaceful rally. The soldiers attacked the protesters, killing 157 people and wounding 1,200 more. Additionally, news sources and civilians reported that the soldiers seized dozens of women and drove them to nearby villas where they gang-raped them for several days.

The government quickly denied any wrongdoing, saying that only 57 were killed and that most were trampled to death by other protesters trying to escape. They also blamed uncontrollable military factions for the rapes. However, the international community would not accept this excuse.

Within days, the United States, the European Union, and the Economic Community of West African States placed arms embargoes on Guinea, froze the government's assets, or restricted travel to and from the country. Additionally, the people of Guinea began organizing symbolic protests of remembrance to mourn those killed by the government.

Members of the opposition organized a daylong general strike throughout Guinea planned for October 28, 2009 (exactly one month after the massacre) to send a message to the government that the people wanted justice and that the government would have to open a dialogue with them. Simultaneously, students from the Federation of Youth Associations of Guinea were organizing students across the country to take part in the strikes while also preparing to go on a five-day hunger strike.

The government deemed both the general strike and the hunger strike illegal. The government had already allowed two days in the beginning of October as a time for mourning and thus considered the general strike to be illegitimate. Additionally, the government considered engaging in a hunger strike to be illegal regardless of the circumstances. Despite this, twelve students announced their intention to participate in the hunger strike and began on October 28.

The general strike closed down most of the businesses, shops, and government offices in the capital city. Contrary to strikes in the past, the leaders of the strike asked that people stay in their houses instead of gathering in the streets to protest. The organizers did this out of fear that public protests would only result in another massacre like that of September 28.

A member of the opposition who was organizing the strike estimated that out of 97,000 government workers, only 3,000 reported to work on the day of the general strike. Overall, the leaders considered this extremely successful, but followed their initial plans to limit the strike to only one day.

On the other hand, the twelve students were not as immediately successful in their hunger strike. After only a day, government soldiers arrested the students, apparently under orders from the regime and eventually ended their hunger strike by forcing them to eat after only two days.

Over the next day, the soldiers stripped the students of their clothes, beat them, interrogated them, and tortured them. Throughout this process, the soldiers constantly insulted the students and told them that they would be killed or buried alive. One of the students reported that the soldiers believed them to be "instruments" of Western countries and that the soldiers viewed them as unpatriotic because of their strike.

Early on October 29 and hours after their arrest, the soldiers presented the students with a choice: either eat bread and corned beef or be given fifty lashes—a punishment that could be fatal. The students unanimously chose to eat.

After effectively ending their hunger strike, the soldiers placed the students in crates with other prisoners that had perpetrated more severe crimes. The government ordered the students, who had been stripped of all of their possessions, to pay to get out of prison. But the students were unable to pay, as they no longer had any money with them. Thus, they stayed in the crate when not

being interrogated and were not allowed to leave even to use the restroom.

The soldiers interrogated the students again and threatened them at gunpoint if they would not confess to a conspiracy or admit their criminality. Eventually, the soldiers received orders from their superiors to take the students to the hospital for a medical check. While at the hospital, several high-level government officials arrived and told the students that the arrest was a mistake and even praised the students for their “noble” actions. In addition, President Camara requested to meet with the students that very night, though this never came to fruition, presumably because he was too busy.

There is no documentation suggesting exactly why this drastic change of attitude toward the students took place, but it is possible to guess that the soldiers were acting based on commands from fairly low-ranking officials or on their own accord when they initially arrested the students. When news of their arrest reached higher-ranking officials, they probably feared a similar outcry from the Guinean people and uproar from the international community that followed the September 28 massacre.

Luckily for the students, the hunger strike did create a line of communication between the Federation of Youth Associations of Guinea and high-level officials in the government. The government likely ceded this concession in an attempt to pacify the students who they had been wrongfully detained. The students also used their experiences in the hunger strike as a way to reach out to more Guineans, beginning with their first press conference on October 30. While nothing direct or concrete came from their hunger strike that substantially challenged the government’s rule or authority, it applied one more pressure to a government with an already battered image.

Although this is not directly related to this campaign, it is important to note that President Camara stepped down from the presidency in late December 2009 following a failed assassination attempt. Along with his abdication, Camara presented a plan by which Guinea would have fair and free elections in July of 2010. Although these elections were pushed back repeatedly, they were eventually held on November 16, 2010. Alpha Condé, a member of the opposition, won the election (although both parties are still challenging aspects of the results) and there was widespread hope that he would be a positive force in a newly democratic Guinea.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators on September 28, 2009 was the predominant influence on this campaign. (1)

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**Additional Notes:**

It is obvious that the campaigners in Guinea learned from their failed strike on September 28, 2009 that large rallies in Guinea were not a good idea. Consequently, it is interesting to see that they chose to strike with the campaigners remaining in their homes instead of gathering in their streets. This seems to be contrary to other campaigns I have worked on where the campaigners do not learn from past events.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Matthew Heck, 21/11/2010

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