

Spotlight interview with Dilé Diallo (CNTG-Guinea)

“The Guinean trade union movement is strong but needs to build up its competences”

Brussels, 31 October 2007 (ITUC Online): **Since the mass mobilisation of workers, which met with brutal repression, at the beginning of the year, the Guinean trade union movement has become a key actor in the transition to democracy embarked on by the new consensus government. But it is proving to be a long and delicate process, requiring international solidarity, explains Dilé Diallo, researcher and trainer at the CNTG (1), external collaborator of the ILO, and advisor to the Ministry of Employment, Public Service and Reform of the Administration.**

The trade union movement would seem to crystallise all the hopes of the nation. How would you explain this?

It should be noted, first of all, that Guinea has a long tradition of trade unionism, given that the country owes its independence to the fight of the trade union movement. As regards the support the movement currently enjoys among the population, it is the result of the disaffection created by the bad governance and the particularly disastrous management of the administration that fell following the events of January and February 2007. People from all sections of society joined the protest movement led by the enlarged inter-union group (CNTG-USTG, ONSLG and UDTG). The trade union movement assumed its responsibility by deciding to address the ills of the country: poverty, the high cost of living, corruption, insecurity and unemployment. It showed that it isn't indifferent to the fate of the people. Its strength essentially rests on the unity between the workers who, far from considering themselves to be a class apart, are at one with the other members of the Guinean nation. Unlike the opposition parties, it is a movement that serves the general interest, that is well established in the informal economy and that transcends tribal and ethnic differences.

What progress has been made over the last few months?

The action of the enlarged inter-union group led to the formation of an interim government, charged not only with the task of redressing the macroeconomic situation but, first and foremost, with that of easing the plight of a people suffering from terrible poverty. There is a push for change, spurred by the direct dialogue between the governors and the governed, who now frequently express their views on the affairs of the State. The unions have, for example, demanded the revision of the mining agreements and are involved in the inter-ministerial work underway on this issue. Mineral exports are essential to the national economy but they have contributed very little so far to the population's well being because of the tax exemptions and, invariably, corruption. We have also seen a strengthening of the national currency, which had seriously depreciated at the end of 2006. As regards education, the results of the national exams demonstrate a determination to put things back in order, to fight corruption and promote competence. Our country needs “good heads” to guarantee its future. This process has to be pursued now, by creating the right conditions for students to develop and succeed, such as better infrastructures and motivated human resources.

Huge difficulties remain nonetheless?

What is needed, first and foremost, is a general change of mentality. The progressive forces that have realised that Guinea is lagging behind in terms of its socio-economic development and have decided to make up for lost time are confronted with the resistance of those who have taken part in looting the country through crooked practices. We are going through a period of flux, with the former leaders clutching on to what power they have left. It's a dangerous situation. At the same

time, the outcome of this power struggle is a foregone conclusion. Change is the only alternative. We have a duty to honour the memory of those who lost their lives during the sombre events of early 2007.

Are you alluding to current bottlenecks in the administration?

Yes. Although a consensus government has been formed, it's still bedlam in the ministries. This chaos is being sustained at the highest level and is stopping the ministries from progressing with the new appointments in their various offices and departments. The old governmental team is still at the helm, not to mention the parallel networks that remain highly influential and are undermining the efforts to establish good governance and transparency. This is slowing the progress in the fight against impunity, corruption and all their consequences. Guinea is a potentially rich country and we shouldn't leave it in the hands of predators whilst the population lives in misery.

The Guinean trade union movement is strong, but cruelly lacking in resources. How do you plan to counter this?

It is true. The events of January and February 2007 demonstrated the vitality of the trade union movement. But even the best intentions in the world are not enough. We desperately need to professionalise our organisations and make them autonomous. They need local competences. The training of trade union educators needs to be pursued and special emphasis has to be placed upon training specialists in economics, law, negotiation and communications, etc. Such experts are in critically short supply at the moment and their absence is felt in the negotiations with employers. We have to adapt to globalisation and to the latest developments in information technology. To achieve this, we need help from the authorities as well as outside support – the main source of which would be international trade union organisations and unions from Western countries. It's essential to ensuring fruitful social development for a people too long deprived of any hopes for the future.

Interview by Jacky Delorme

- Read the complete report in the "Union View" on Guinea at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/guineeEN.pdf>

- Also read the interview of Rabiadou Diallo (General Secretary of the CNGT) at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article1084&lang=en> <<http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article1084&lang=en>>

- Further information is also available in the chapter on Guinea in the ITUC Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights (report and video) at <http://survey07.ituc-csi.org/getcountry.php?IDCountry=GIN&IDLang=EN> <<http://survey07.ituc-csi.org/getcountry.php?IDCountry=GIN&IDLang=EN>>

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